Marian Meditations Part II



Marian Meditations

by

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Preface

In the second volume of his "Marian Meditations", Father Idelfonso Villa, SDB makes us contemplate the Mother of God from Christ's cradle to His burial.

At long last, Mary sees the face of the Word Incarnate, Her divine Son. A few adore Him in His manger and in the Temple of Jerusalem. And yet, how true the words of Simeon that "this child shall be a sign of contradiction". Exiled in Egypt, He then hides Himself at Nazareth. Mary and Joseph silently marvel at God's wisdom, goodness and beauty.

The Woman of Genesis obtains the start of Christ's public mission and the gift of faith for His disciples. She now remains quiet in the background. And yet, while His disciples hide, She openly side with Jesus during His salvific Passion. The Woman of the Apocalypse suffers the pangs of childbirth and becomes the Mother of Christ's many brethren and their Co-Redemptrix. When "all is consummated", the Sorrowful Mother longs for the Resurrection of Her divine Son.

Fr. Benoit Wailliez, SSPX

MEDITATION 41

The Divine Birth

1. The Ingratitude of His Own People

See how literally the words of the Gospel are fulfilled. *They who were His own gave Him no welcome.* What ignorance of the things of God! If only those people had suspected what was going to happen that blessed night! When there is a real submission to the will of God, we should not care as to the why and wherefore of God's dispositions.

On the other hand if those people of Bethlehem could find an excuse in their ignorance. Have not we ourselves been granted a thousand proofs to enable us to know the things of God and so ascertain who He is and where He can be found?

Ask pardon from our Lord for the very many times you barred your heart against His entrance, for the many times He wanted to perform some good through you and you hindered Him.

2. The Birth

If oblivion, neglect and even contempt were all that His own brought to the arrival of Jesus, instead look at Mary. Enter that grotto and observe with holy curiosity all that is taking place there. Enlightened by the Holy Ghost, Mary has come to know that the moment of the birth of Her divine Son is already at hand and tired though She is by the long wearisome journey, yet She has no desire to rest. Now, more than ever, She draws Herself into most fervent prayer. Her ardent desires and sighs do irresistible violence to the Heart of God. He lets Himself be conquered by Mary's prayer, and when She reaches the peak of ecstasy, the Holy Ghost in miraculous manner acts and Mary opening Her eyes, finds lying on Her mantle as white as a snowflake, more beautiful than the angels, the Son of God. Her Son. Mary, virgin before His birth, is also virgin without blemish in His birth. Just as a sunbeam goes through a crystal without breaking or staining it, so also was the Son of Mary born.

Draw closer confidently and watch that scene. Jesus is about to receive the first adoration and with it the first caresses of a mother. Mary addresses Her God, living there, really and physically present. But as a Mother She is entitled to lift that little child and

imprint on His delicate cheeks the first kiss. With what ardent love She would kiss Him. What a warm embrace, what tender caresses! Jesus does not feel the poverty of that stable, nor does He feel the cold of the night because the first thing His eyes have seen on opening was the face of His Mother. Have you ever witnessed the charming smile of a little child when it rested its eyes on something pleasant? Then try to picture the smile of Jesus on seeing His Mother, so pure, so beautiful, so tender. A mother and son do not grow tired of looking at each other. That glance of Mary is joy and consolation from Jesus as the glance of Jesus is an increase of grace and sanctity from Mary.

With what respect and devotion and at the same time with what tenderness and delicacy did Mary wrap the little body of Her Son in the clean though poor swaddling clothes! With what profound sorrow did She place Him on the straw in the manger. God so closely embraced poverty that He had neither house nor hut to dwell in. How great, then, is the value of poverty, since the Son of God seems to have associated Himself with it. Ask Mary for the grace to know the value of this virtue in order to love and practise it.

3. The First-Born

The Gospel says that Mary gave birth to Her first-born. Jesus was indeed, Her first-born. He is our Elder Brother. Then came we, who are also children of Mary. What happiness is ours! The Mother of God is our Mother also. Jesus is our Brother. Each one of us is a brother of Christ. Have you ever reflected upon this? Have you ever paused to consider what all this means, on the part of God, on the part of men? This is the climax of bounty and love. This is the greatest glory and dignity to which you can aspire.

A title so sweet that God would not even give it to His own angels. Mary is, indeed, the queen of angels, but the angels cannot call Her Mother as we can whenever we kneel before the cradle of Jesus. In the presence of this Mother, think and relish these most sweet truths.

4. Cradle Prayer

Before closing this consideration approach Mary and ask Her to let you hold Her Son in your arms for a few moments.

Entertain Him. Press Him against your heart and tell Him that He is enthroned there forever. Ask Him to leave His cradle and the manger for the palace of your soul where you will give Him warmth and comfort.

Ask Him to teach you how to love His Mother and ask His Mother to teach you how to love Her Son.

Remember that the life of Jesus began with a glance at Mary, as it ended on the cross with a glance at Her. Do you not think that this is a hint for you, telling you that the whole of your life should unfold itself under Her eyes? Learn how to look at Her and remember that you are under Her constant watch.



MEDITATION 42

The First Adorers

1. The Shepherds

God chose them to represent mankind and be the first to whom the mystery of Jesus was revealed. Why were they chosen? On account of their simplicity. The child Jesus shows Himself to those who are child-like in their simplicity. Simplicity is the straight road to God. Simplicity is the ingenuous faith possessed by those shepherds. Simplicity is blind obedience just as their obedience was.

The shepherds did not take pride in it. Having heard the voice of the Angels, they simply accepted their invitation to go to the crib. Self-love, on the contrary, must ponder over and make its own calculations beforehand. An injection of our self love into the heart of the shepherds would probably have caused them to give up the idea of going to Bethlehem. "One never knows, they might have said, people will laugh at us.

It might be a bluff. Suppose there is nothing, then we shall cut such a poor figure!" This is the language of self-love. How different is the faith, the obedience and the humility proper of simplicity. What place does this little virtue occupy in your heart?

2. The Joy of Our Lady

What joy would flood the heart of our Lady when She saw and heard their story! In order to reward the faith and simplicity of those humble shepherds Mary takes Jesus and shows Him to them and hands Him over to their affectionate embrace and caresses. To possess Jesus is the reward of simplicity and obedience. Note, however, that Mary is the one who gives them Jesus.

This His first manifestation to mankind, Jesus wants done through His Mother. This is the first surrender of Himself to men. But He is given to us through Mary. Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, showed it to Adam, gave it to him and so we were lost. Mary shows the fruit of Her most pure womb to the shepherds and in them to all men, She hands Jesus to them and we are saved.

Jesus is the Saviour, but He is so through Our Blessed Lady. Jesus receives us through our Heavenly

Mother. There is no other way to Him than through Mary. "You will never find Jesus without Mary, says St. Bonaventure. You cannot, therefore, put Jesus and Mary asunder. We shall find Him in the arms of Mary, just as the shepherds did. When we fall as they did at the feet of Jesus we shall find that we have also fallen at the feet of Mary.

3. The Magi

A special divine revelation drives them to Bethlehem. A star has appeared in the sky and an inspiration has arisen in their hearts, The Magi, docile to this call, start on their journey. See their docility and the readiness of their obedience. They leave everything at once, country, home, family, comfort, in order to embark upon a long and extremely hard journey.

Humanly speaking, this is sheer madness. You must be convinced that to the world and to the prudence of the flesh the things of God look fantastically mad. However, you must love and seek this divine madness. Remember the moment when the star disappeared. A terrible moment of doubt and of hesitation. Had they perhaps made a mistake? Would it not be better to retrace their steps? Think how different would have been the story of the Magi if they had

yielded. What an immense pity would it have been to be on the threshold of success, almost at the end of their journey, and then to go back losing it all at the last moment. This is a perfect image of the inconstant. Do not forget that it is only the one who perseveres that secures victory. Do not forget that perseverance is the touch-stone of love.

4. Arrival in Bethlehem

See them now in Bethlehem. The victory is complete. The star is shining again leading them up to the very dwelling of the child Jesus. But there is another difficulty. Should not they, people of noble birth, find it below their dignity to enter such a poor place and address a small child surrounded by such poverty? Here lies the merit of faith. Faith is not deceived by appearances but goes deep to the root and sees what the eye cannot distinguish. The Magi see God despite the poverty of the stable and falling on their knees they adore Him.

See them offering their gifts. Meditate on the significance. Here everything suggests sacrifice: the gold represents sacrifice through love, incense symbolizes sacrifice through prayer, myrrh signifies sacrifice through mortification and penance. We can find Jesus only through sacrifice. Sacrifice is a gift most pleasing to Him.

5. The Mother with the Child

The gospel says that they found the child with its Mother, Mary. This detail must not be overlooked. The Gospel reminds us again that the child is with its Mother. Here Mary is shown for the first time instructing the gentiles. She shows Jesus to the Magi and through them She shows Christianity to the pagan world. To Mary we all owe our faith. Let us through Her offer our gifts and especially the gifts of our heart to the beloved child.

Moreover, remember that in your own life there is also a star. You have to follow your vocation in spite of all difficulties. Should its light be eclipsed, should you be unable to see the end of your journey, you have still a vocation to follow. Be faithful to it, be constant in trial. Never disregard an inspiration from Heaven. Many graces may be linked to it.

Finally, consider that for you there is still another star that is always shining. A star that will never disappear. You can always follow it. This star is Mary, Our Beloved Mother. She will guide you and comfort you in your difficult moments. But lift your eyes and look at Her and realise that She is ever shining upon the steps of your life and guiding the movements of your heart. Repeat with St. Bernard: *Look at the star; always invoke Mary.*

This mystery of the life of Our Lady is one of the most touching. There the heroic degree of Her virtues shines forth in an extraordinary manner.



MEDITATION 43

The Purification of Our Lady

Once you have Him, what else can you want? If there is aught else that you long for, it means you are not able to enjoy His presence.

1. Her Recollection

It was ordered by the Law that after the birth of a child the mother should keep indoors 40 days before her legal purification.

How willingly Our Lady kept this injunction of the law! Her love for recollection and prayer was great, indeed; but just now when She had Her Son with Her what a happiness it was to keep at home! At home She had Jesus and thus had everything. What more could She desire or find outside? Think that something similar should happen also to you. Strive to keep Jesus in your heart.

2. Her Purity

Our Lady was conceived without sin. Always She was without blemish or — stain always more shining and pure than the sun. Nothing ever ruffled the sweet beauty of Her immaculate perfection. Yet now She had to appear before the priest in order to be purified! Purified of what? What an example! What impurity was there in Her, purity itself? She so fond of cleanliness of heart is not yet satisfied, and craves for greater cleanliness still. Do you love purity so much? Do you show the same eagerness to purify your soul at holy confession? Do you make use of all the means that the Church places at your disposal to clean and sanctify your soul?

If Mary is not satisfied with Her immaculateness, if She, if possible, would be more immaculate still how can you indulge in complacency? Do you think Our Lady when looking at your soul feels very pleased? Will She find there the cleanliness She loves? Give a thought to this and feel shame. Ask your Mother a share of Her love of that delicate and precious virtue. Ask Her to have a passionate love for its shining beauty.

3. Her Obedience

She was not bound by that law, and well She knew it, Her conception and the miraculous birth of Jesus was the work of the Holy Ghost. She had been greeted "Blessed among women", on account of the wonders wrought in Her by the virtue of the Almighty, acclaimed the one who would be called Blessed by all generations to come. And yet, in spite of all Her greatness She does not exempt Herself from the Law. When it is a question of obeying She wants no privilege. And just like an ordinary woman, as though nothing extraordinary had happened in Her, She willingly submits to the common law. Consequently, after 40 days She starts on Her journey to Jerusalem thus being, as Her Son, a model of obedience.

How this example should confound us. What a difference between Her obedience and our own! How often without sufficient reason we consider ourselves exempt from obeying even in cases when obedience does not demand from us humiliations and sacrifices, which in any case are never greater than those of Our Lady on this occasion. Our Lady's obedience was heroic since the sacrifice entailed by it was, as we are going to see, highly humiliating.

4. Her Humility

Here is the principle, the incomprehensible part of this mystery. Mary is so extraordinary in all, but particularly in humility.

Remember the love of our Lady for virginity and how She was ready to renounce the glory of being the Mother of God in order to remain a virgin. And yet out of humility She now sacrifices the appearances of Her virginity and poses as an ordinary stained woman needing purification. One would say that Her love for humility brings Her to the point of such a total renunciation that She even gives up the external glory of virginity and appears as if She were neither the Mother of God nor a virgin but an ordinary soiled creature. How sublime is the humility of Mary! How humiliating is this obedience, and yet how promptly She obeys! What a delight She takes in humiliation!

Contemplate your Mother well. The more She humbles Herself, the greater She is. See Her, hidden among the Jewish women, just one of them, but see how God singles Her out and chooses Her from the rest. She is the lily flower of candour. She is the hidden violet of sublime humility. How much glory must She have given to God through the exercise of

those virtues! What delight will God have taken in Her! Meditate profoundly. Compare yourself with Her. Throw your pride at Her feet. Shed your self love and vanity. Try to follow Her footsteps.

5. Her Poverty

She was not in a position as other women to offer a little lamb. And since the poor were allowed to substitute a couple of turtle doves, She comes forward with the offering of the poor. Poverty is humiliating but it is much more so when it is public. Yet Mary is not ashamed of being poor or of being known as such. She is ready to be despised by the well-to-do.

If those little doves had been able to understand their value in the hands of Mary, how happy they would have considered themselves! They were nothing less than the offering of Mary's Sacrifice. Offer yourself to Mary. Tell Her you want to be Her possession forever. But if your sacrifice is to be of any value you must imitate Her closely. Why do you not strive to copy those virtues in your heart, especially those that cost more, the most humiliating, the most self-effacing and self-sacrificing? Come, try and copy your model.

MEDITATION 44

The Presentation of the Child

1. Mary Enters the Temple

She has been purified and, therefore, deemed worthy to enter the Temple. How great was Her respect and devotion at that moment! She knew the Temple was the place of prayer; the place wherein God communicates Himself to souls. Although in the Temple of the Old Testament He was present rather in a symbolic and figurative manner, nevertheless it was the dwelling of the Almighty.

Mary reveres and respects the Temple where the Majesty of God dwells. How would Mary enter our Temples? What a lesson for us who sometimes are so disrespectful in those sacred places. When She entered the Temple with Her child in Her arms She sanctified it. We go to the Temple in order to be sanctified. She with Her Son went to the Temple to sanctify the very Temple.

What recollections must have then flooded Her mind! In the Temple at a tender age She had been presented by Her parents. Thus, She had spent the first years of Her childhood. There She had passed long hours in prayer and had uttered to the Lord Her vow of virginity. How many memories would those holy precincts whisper to Mary!

As for you, is the Temple speechless? Does it not remind you of graces, of the sacraments, of inspirations, of communications with which you have been favoured there? Have you forgotten that in front of that image of Our Lady you received so many signs of the love She bears you? Love the Temple. It must for you be the most longed-for of all places. Nowhere will you find God as there. Love the Temple and at the same time respect it. Do not allow anything unworthy of its sanctity.

2. The Sacrifice of Mary

But above all, the Temple is the place of sacrifice *par excellence*. Mary goes there to offer to God the most beautiful, the most painful, of Her sacrifices. According to the Law, all the first-born were to be offered to the Lord and then had to be ransomed by payment of five sicles of silver. Jesus and Mary do

not hold themselves exempt from this Law but submit to its exact fulfilment.

Jesus is offered up to His Eternal Father and is then ransomed by His Mother. Such is the sublime simplicity of this mystery. But it is all a mystery of sacrifice. Never forget: Sacrifice and Jesus are inseparable. The Child offers Himself voluntarily to His Father as a victim of expiation, repeating on that occasion the words of the psalm: The holocausts of animals are no longer pleasing to Thee so behold I came. Here I am. But this sacrifice was not His alone. His Mother also is there. She offers the Divine Child, a sacrifice to the Eternal Father.

Recall the sacrifice of Abraham ready to immolate his son to fulfil the Holy Will of God. Some say that this order was given to the father and not to the mother because the latter would have been incapable of performing such sacrifice. But now it is the mother who fully conscious and well aware of what She is doing, fully understanding the meaning and the depth of the ceremony, offers Her son as a sacrifice, later to be consummated.

This is the self same offertory of the First Mass said by Christ on the Cross. On the day of His passion and death how many times would not Mary re-

call the far-off day of the Child's presentation! The Eternal Father was well pleased to accept the offering and was not content as in the case of Abraham with a mere intention. He demanded its exact fulfilment to the very end. How great were the generosity and the love of Mary and of Jesus!

Thank them for this offering since it is to them that we owe our salvation. And you also readily offer yourself up for any sacrifice, whatever it may be. Offer yourself up as a victim of expiation and love, and rejoice if God, pleased to receive your offering, accepts your immolation. Both in promising as well as in fulfilling be generous in your promises to Jesus and Mary.

3. Mediation of Mary

In this mystery you can see stressed the universal mediation of Mary. Jesus had taken human flesh in Mary's bosom. Jesus will be immolated on the Cross in union with Mary. She will stand by the Cross till the end. Now, in this presentation there is something else. Jesus wants to be brought to the sacrifice and offered up by Mary. In other words it is Our Lady, so to speak, who is here the priest, She it is who takes the Holy Host in Her hands for

immolation. She is the altar of the sacrifice. Her heart and Her arms are the sacred stone on which the Divine Victim, Her own Son, is being immolated. Is not this cooperation of Mary in the work of redemption something truly magnificent? Must not we be filled with confidence on seeing Her so closely linked to God in the Redemption, the greatest work of God?

Follow Our Lady's footsteps by achieving your immolation within your heart. Root out and destroy whatever is not pleasing to Her, so that nothing inordinate remains in you.

4. Jesus Ransomed

Lastly, consider that the final part of the ceremony was the ransom. Jesus is ransomed by His Mother, not just for Herself, that She may just rejoice in Her Son, but in order to rear Him and bring Him up as our servant and slave, in as much as one day His life will have to be surrendered for us. There is no moment, therefore, in our Lady's life at which we can find any trace of selfishness in Her actions or in those of Her divine Son. It is all pure and disinterested love with no selfish aims but just with a view to the welfare of others.

Well did She know that all the travails inherent to the rearing of the Divine Child were not for Her benefit but just for us. Yet She is always ready to work in order to give us that great treasure, Her Son. How grateful should we feel towards Jesus and Mary! How much our ever present selfishness has to learn! Always seek God and the welfare of your neighbour, never seek yourself. This is in your ideal.



MEDITATION 45

Simeon's Prophecies

1. Simeon

Simeon, says the Gospel, was a just, God-fearing man; he was awaiting the consolation of Israel. By the sanctity of this life he had prepared himself to become worthy of seeing and knowing the Messias. The Holy Ghost had made known to him that he would not die without seeing the Redeemer. This promise urged him to become a saint. Why do not the promises of Jesus work the same effect in you? Do you not know that it is through sanctity of life that you can possess Jesus and Mary in life, in death, in eternity?

What else do you want? What other blessing could you covet? Why, then, do you not decide as Simeon did to become a saint, so that you also may deserve the happiness to hold Jesus in your arms and know His Holy Mother?

2. The Revelation

That day finally arrived. Enlightened by a heavenly light, Simeon recognised the Woman, hidden though She was in the crowd. He knew Her to be the Mother of the Saviour. In the Child She was holding in Her arms he saw the promised Messias. Note that it is through Mary that you recognise Jesus. Through the Mother to the Son. Always the same procedure. Never Jesus without Mary. Then Simeon comes forward and asks the Mother to lend him Her Son. With what fervour would he look at Him and press Him against his heart, whilst remaining absorbed in contemplation, carried away by joy and love!

Contemplate that holy old man holding in his arms the one Who sustains the whole of creation. How well spent must he have considered his life of austerity and sanctity for the joy of that moment! He holds himself very well paid with that alone. And it was then that, carried away, he intoned the sublime canticle of thanksgiving to the Lord, the *Nunc dimittis: Ruler of all, now do Thou let Thy servant go in peace according to Thy word, for my own eyes have seen that saving power of Thine which thou has prepared in the sight of all nations.* After Simeon

has seen Mary and has held Jesus in his arms he wants nothing more in this world. He knows there is nothing else to be compared to this happiness. Everything will now be tiresome and boring. Earth holds nothing more for him, he just longs for death. And you who daily see, and touch, and are fed on Jesus, how is it that you can still relish other things? Nor have you yet died to all other things, yourself included, in order to live only of, and for, Him?

3. The Prophecy

It was at the moment that Simeon, filled with the Holy Ghost, turned towards Mary and said: *Behold, Your child is destined to bring about the fall of many and the rise of many in Israel; to be a sign which men will refuse to acknowledge.* What an impression these words must cause in the heart of Our Lady! She pondered over them trying to comprehend their deep and mysterious meaning, for She was aware that they had been dictated by God Himself. You also must try to understand the full meaning of these words: *Jesus, cause of the fall and of the rise, of the ruin and of salvation for many.* That is to say, from now henceforth this Child will be the ulti-

mate reason for the salvation, or for the condemnation, of mankind. Whoever is saved is saved through Jesus; whoever is lost is lost through Jesus. He is, therefore, salvation and life for those who want it. He calls all, seeks all, invites all, He dies and sheds His blood for all. He founds His church and enriches it with those sacraments that are fountain springs of life and for the salvation for the benefit of all. He is, therefore, the only Saviour of the world. All those souls who have sanctified themselves and reached the glorious possession of Heaven have done so through Jesus. No one could have achieved that by himself. But on the contrary, whoever persists in rejecting the Blood of Jesus will be irreparably lost.

Enter in to the heart of Mary and try to imagine what happened within Her smile. She listened to those words. All of a sudden Our Mother's heart saw all that Jesus was doing and was about to do for the sake of men. She saw Him bleed on the Cross; She saw Him die for us. She also saw a great number of men refusing to avail themselves of the merits and grace of Jesus. She saw them trampling in His blood. She saw how that Blood would eternally call vengeance against them and weigh

heavily on their rebellious heads. For your part, thank Jesus and ask Him to be not the occasion of your fall but your salvation. Try also to feel the pain and sorrow that Our Lady experienced at the sight of the souls who refuse to avail themselves of the Redemption.

3. A Sign of Contradiction

Finally, Simeon adds that the Child is a sign which men will refuse to acknowledge. In front of Jesus there is no middle way. Either we are with Him or we are against Him. This phenomenon can be observed from His birth. Shepherds and Magi adore Him but Herod seeks His death. His presence dispels indifference. It excites either love or hatred; either devotion or rancour.

The Church with her experience dating back twenty centuries confirms this truth. There have always been faithful disciples who followed Him even to death and there have also been those who with implacable hatred slandered and persecuted Him. How many souls love Jesus; how many miserable creatures live only to insult Him? Be persuaded that there are no half ways with Jesus. No middle road. Either with Him or against Him. Out then

with all those tepidities and compromises! Hold fast to Him. Promise Him love and eternal loyalty. Ask Our Lady that these sentiments may never change, and endeavour to make your life an endless act of love toward Jesus.



MEDITATION 46

Simeon's Prophecies about Mary

1. The Sword of Sorrow

To Mary Simeon added the frightening expression: *And Thine own soul also will have a sword to pierce it.* Thus, in prophecy is described the share of sufferings and sorrows which Mary must bear with Her Son. A sword of sorrow will constantly pierce Her heart through and through.

Already on the day of Her annunciation our Lady, on hearing the proposal of the Archangel, was made to understand the terrible sufferings that would accompany Her dignity as Mother of God. Nevertheless, courageous and generous, She uttered the fiat by which She accepted whatever the Lord would be pleased to send Her. What would She now feel on seeing how soon that fiat was to be accomplished? The sword of sorrow was seen by Her not as something

in the vague future, in some far off distance. No, it was already beginning to pierce Her soul with cruel pain. Accompany that sword into the Heart of Mary. Through the same wound enter the most intimate recesses of that Most Pure Heart and try to fathom the intensity of Her tremendous sorrow.

2. Deep Sorrow

Consider that this pain was more intense in as much as it had been foreseen. If God had hidden the sword and the sorrow from Mary and had let it come unexpectedly at the very moment of Calvary, She would at least have spent thirty three years in relative tranquillity enjoying without fear the presence of Her Son. But God wanted Mary to intimate Her Son also in this.

Jesus had not only to suffer on the cross. The redemption was started in Bethlehem. And therefore from the Crib to the Cross there passed no moment without suffering. Such was also to be the case with Mary. Thus, the sword of sorrow pierced Her heart this very day. At no moment of Her life will the sword be withdrawn.

As the sins of men were to be an endless chain, is there any wonder, then, that the sufferings of

Jesus and Mary should also be constant and unbroken? Think often of this: they never stop suffering because men never stop sinning.

3. Relentless Sorrow

A foreseen and inescapable evil can embitter all our joys. The patient who has been given up by the doctors is never without anguish, no matter if there are painless moments. The very fact that there is no cure, that he is doomed to death renders him joyless and sad. If we do not tremble at the thought of death, it is because we persuade ourselves that death is not so near; it is something far off.

But that was not the case with Mary. Good Friday was always present to Her mind. And therefore all Her joys, all the sweetness of the presence of Jesus, would always be tainted with this remembrance. Watch Her in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, in Egypt. Picture in your mind any of those tender moments between Mother and Son. And the beauty of Jesus, when She is enjoying His presence, realise how the dark remembrance of those fateful words, the sword of prophecy is cutting into Her heart. Always the remembrance, the words, the sword of Simeon.

And it would always be so: whenever She pressed Him against Her heart, whenever She combed His beautiful hair, when serving Him at table, when watching the delicate traits of that most beautiful face, when absorbing the shining light of those beautiful eyes, when admiring those rosy cheeks of the Infant Jesus, She would suddenly shudder with horror. All that beauty would one day be defiled by spittle, by buffets and scourges, by thorns and nails, which would so barbarously torture Her Adorable Son. And so day after day, night after night, Her imagination is tortured by the vision of such horrible scenes. Learn also to sacrifice yourself generously if Jesus so wants it. Be ready to renounce even spiritual enjoyments as did Mary throughout all Her life.

4. Unalleviated Sorrow

Think, lastly, that nothing on earth could alleviate the pain of this piercing sword. Neither time that cures all nor hope which can always lull us into the thought that perhaps it will not happen. But it was God's will that it must happen and She knew that fulfilment was inevitable. That is why everyday that passed, far from healing the wound, would rather rub it the more, since the moment of

tremendous sacrifice was every day drawing nearer.

Yet, in spite of this, far from being frightened, She would day by day generously strengthen Her desire that the dreadful moment should arrive, not only because such was the Will of God, but also for our own salvation and welfare. Her sorrow is great but Her charity and love is greater still. The more She suffers for us, the more Her love grows for us. For your part adore God's judgments and orders whenever, and sometimes when you least expect it, suffering comes to try God's children.

Mary, full of joy, had gone to the Temple absorbed in the delightful contemplation of Her Son. That joy was increased when Simeon revealed Jesus as the Light and Salvation of mankind. But suddenly when inebriated by this divine joy, the Sword of Sorrow was thrust into Her heart. Poor Mother! Now She does not see in Jesus only Her loving Son; She sees in Him as a Victim marked for the sacrifice, the Lamb of God who is going to be immolated for the salvation of the world.

Approach Mary and whisper a word of consolation. Promise Her never to increase Her sorrows with your sins. Try to alleviate Her sword of sorrow by atonement and amendment, by love.

MEDITATION 47

The Holy Innocents

This passage of the Gospel is the first fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy. Just a few days, or perhaps even only a few hours have elapsed and Jesus begins publicly to appear as a sign of contradiction. Herod seeks to put Him to death. The sword of sorrow strikes the Heart of Mary and tortures Her soul. Let us devote our meditation to this important passage.

1. Herod

Who is he? A cruel tyrant, known for the deaths he caused. In his own family alone the death roll comprises his own wife, two of his children, two of his uncles. Five days before His death, when his rotten body was already being eaten by worms, he ordered the murder of a third son of his. Herod is a clear example of how far a man can go when enslaved by passion. Herod was a victim of ambition;

in his eyes all else was insignificant when it was a matter of upholding his throne and preserving his crown. As soon as he hears the news of the birth of a child king, the thought of killing him flashes through his mind. And when he is let down by the Magi, he issues the terrible order to slaughter *all children below the age of two.*

Hear the wailing and screaming of those poor mothers. Try to picture the scenes of horror of wrath and despair when the order was executed by soldiers. See the blood of those innocent victims flowing abundantly. And try to imagine the anguish and fear of Mary. How would She press Her beloved child against Her heart in order to hide and protect Him, especially when She could hear the screaming of the mothers, when the butchery had already begun. You could imagine the hours of anguish through which She lived.

In front of this scene of blood and sorrow, reflect on the terrible consequences of passion, how far it can reach, what frightful results can follow. What a terrible evil is passion in spate! It totally blinds us and drags us to the abyss. It makes us fear what we need not fear and makes us disregard what we ought to fear most.

Herod fears a little Child whereas he does not fear the dreadful cruel sin he is committing. Passion can drag a man to anything, even to crime. Passion is never satisfied, never says enough. Moreover, when we yield to it, passion gives us nothing, neither happiness nor contentment. What did Herod get out of that bloodshed? Reflect on this, see how barren passion always is, how easily we let ourselves be overcome by it. Examine your soul; see whether any passion is trying to get the upper hand of you. Check it; clamp it down, lest it subdue you.

2. The Children

How lovely and sweet appear those children, the first fruits of martyrdom. Many think they are to be pitied, but seen in the eyes of faith how fortunate they are! Though newly born, they are already saints. The church has canonized them and keeps their feast at Christmastide. Their innocent souls enjoy in Heaven the rewards assigned to innocence, but God gave them another and better life that none will ever be able to snatch from them. And why? Because they died for Jesus. They died in the place of Jesus and for His sake. That is the reason for every their happiness as it is indeed the reason for

of every happiness. To work, to suffer, to sacrifice ourselves, even to die for Our Lord: this is the only thing really worthwhile, the only thing that can make us happy now and forever.

What would have become of those children, had they not died for Our Lord? They would probably not be saints, nor glorified with any crown. They might have become simple peasants, workers, shepherds, soldiers. Who knows they might even have become those very executioners who took part in the passion and death of Jesus. They might have become anything; but in fact see what they are now, just because they approached Jesus and His only Mother. How does Mary look upon them? Would She not keep within Her heart fond remembrance and affectionate gratitude towards those victims who took the place of Her Son? Could She ever forget them?

Reflect on it, and deeply imprint it on your heart. If you want Our Lady never to forget you, if you want Jesus to reward you, approach Him, love Him, suffer for Him, sacrifice yourself for His sake.

3. The Divine Child

Here Jesus teaches us how the plans of men come to naught when confronted with His power

and wisdom. You can see that in the easy way He dispels the designs and orders of Herod. He also teaches us, by allowing His cradle to be surrounded by the wailing of innocent children, that sacrifice is inseparable from His life; that all, even innocence itself, must be accompanied by penance.

But see how in a moment the scene changes. What was sorrow and tragedy is turned into joy and glory? Jesus always triumphs after persecution. Who would not feel like following that eternal Vanquisher? In His tiny hand we can already see the power to dispose of the destinies of men.

Lastly, ask Our Lady for light to detect your passions which unless duly checked might become a strong source of power. See, for instance, the determination which Herod brings to his evil designs. He stops at nothing. If he had placed this determination at the service of good, he might have been a saint. Direct your passions towards Jesus and Mary; bring the fire of your love for them into devotion and loyalty to them. You will then easily overcome the hindrances which bestrew the path of sanctity.

MEDITATION 48

The Flight Into Egypt

1. The Order of Departure

God avails Himself of Herod's cruelty to send a painful trial to the Holy Family. It is always thus, although we are seldom aware of it. Everything comes from the hand of God, or is, at least, allowed by God for our welfare. It is hard for us to welcome a trial, to resign ourselves to it, when we do not see its ultimate purpose. Then we should recall the Holy Family. They were resting at dead of night after a hard day's toil, in their poor and comfortless house. St. Joseph had to earn the daily bread. Our Lady could not allow Herself the luxury of a maid-servant, but had to do everything by Herself. So that when night fell on that blessed home both all exhausted would drop into their beds. How well earned was that rest.

Contemplate that scene; see the greatest personalities of mankind reposing in their poor beds.

Mary's sleep is an anxious one. The slightest noise would awaken Her. Although She trusts in Divine Providence, Her heart remains watchful. She cannot forget what She has heard, and even in dreams Her imagination depicts scenes of horror which had already begun, or perhaps are going to begin the following day, with the killing of the Holy Innocents.

She does not leave Her child alone; the little baby sleeps in Her arms. How peacefully Jesus rests in the arms of His Mother! There is no softer cradle for Him. No better resting place can be found than in Her arms. But all of a sudden an angel comes to disturb that rest. On God's orders he wakens up Joseph and orders Him to take the road to exile. St. Joseph accepts the divine command but trembles at the thought of having to break the news to Mary. She, in Her turn, receives it with renewed resignation and pressing more tightly Her little Baby and imprinting one more ardent kiss on His forehead sets out to obey.

Try to imagine the sorrow and contrariety that this painful awakening must have caused Mary. However, not a word of protest; not a murmur of discontent. Indeed, a fine example for us.

2. The Details of the Flight

Though this order was so hard, yet God makes no attempt to lighten it. Indeed, on the contrary the flight is rendered more arduous by the circumstances.

Arise now, without waiting for the dawn, without letting a moment pass, without a moment's hesitation. God wants it. There is no time for delay. Merely to do His Holy Will.

Take the child and it is but much more so when it must be done in the company of other weak persons. Joseph is not to fly alone. He must go in the company of the Mother and the Child, and this enormously increases the difficulties.

Flee, as though you were criminals who must profit by the darkness of night to slink away. But was there no other way out? Did He not save Moses in similar circumstances without having recourse to a shameful flight?

It would appear that God chooses the most painful and the hardest ways for His own. *Go to Egypt.* Humanly speaking this is absurd. Egypt is so far away. About ten days journeying. And during this time the poor pilgrims could well be found by the soldiers of Herod and thus give them ample chance to kill the Child. Moreover, Egypt is an unknown

country where idolatry prevails. How could they safely remain in such a place? But was there not a more favourable country? Moreover, how long is all this going to last? This they are not told. *Remain there until further notice*. This is terrible. If it were a matter of few days they could take with them whatever was absolutely essential. But if they were going to stay, perhaps for years, what should they take? These doubts and uncertainties redouble their sorrow. Did Mary break down at the moment? Did heavy tears roll down Her most pure cheeks? She remains serene. Let the Will of God be done.

3. The Obedience

Now consider the sublime obedience of the Holy Family. How exactly, how quickly, how readily they carry out the divine orders. They set out on their journey immediately. See their diligence in fulfilling the Will of God. See, at the same time, their humility, in not raising any objection, in not making the slightest remark. Moreover, they obey with great perseverance. Through all that long pilgrimage they proceed tranquilly, calmly. Never impatient. Because they see the will of God at every step of their journey. It is God's command: that is

enough. Divine providence is wise, is just, is bountiful, and knows perfectly well what it wants. What shining lesson of humility, of submission, of patience in contradiction! What a sublime example of obedience!

Do not try to excuse yourself when you are disobedient. Do not say that you have an angel by your side who tells you clearly what the Will of God is. You know that is not true. The only angel for you is your Superior; he speaks to you in the name of God. How is it that when you do not like what he tells you, when you do not see the reason for what he orders you, you think that he is mistaken and then you obey badly? Who is, indeed, the one who is mistaken? He when commanding, or you when falling to obey? Just look at Mary in this phase of Her life and then answer.



MEDITATION 49

In Exile

1. The Discomforts of the Journey

Consider the hardships of that trip, seemingly endless and so full of fatigue. Perhaps, at the beginning they would not dare travel during the day but, not to be seen, would wait for the night.

Contemplate Our Lady with Her Son in Her arms, never abandoning Him even for a second, full of anxiety, taking shelter in some hideout with St. Joseph during the day and taking advantage of the darkness in order to continue the flight. How little and how uncomfortably would they rest during those days!

Remember the trip to Bethlehem. It also was full of inconveniences, but after all it was a peaceful journey. Now, instead it is a flight. They are running away from a blood-thirsty tyrant, from a ruthless persecutor. You, no doubt, when you had some

contradiction or trouble have spent some sleepless nights. The night seemed endless: the hours seem not to advance. Now, compare that with the nights that Our Blessed Lady had to spend, during Her flight to Egypt, in the face of so many hardships.

What would they eat? They had had no time to make provision; and even if time had been available they had no money. But in fact no time was allowed them. If, at least, one full day had been granted to them to make preparations for the journey! But not even that. And where would they sleep? On the hard ground under a tree or perhaps sharing some untidy cave with animals?

Now compare your fastidiousness with the sufferings of your Heavenly Mother. You are so thin skinned and She, although She was much more delicate than you, was so brave. See whether in front of Her you will have the impertinence to complain when you lack something, when things do not go according to your taste, when you have to bear some little discomfort.

2. In Egypt

They arrived at last; but where, it is not known. We may suppose that they did not remain at the first

frontier post. They would probably wait a few days before taking a decision. They would enquire and take their bearings.

Perhaps Joseph or Our Lady received guidance as to where God wanted them to stay. Or maybe He left that matter to their own discernment, as He often does in order that man may exercise the virtue of prudence. But finally, their abode was fixed in the vicinity of Heliopolis, where some other Jewish families had settled. Now stop to consider the emergency dwelling of the Holy Family. In Bethlehem they had a home, poor though it was. Joseph had his workshop there. But now they have nothing. They must beg for whatever they need. Contemplate Our Heavenly Mother reduced to the condition of a beggar. They had nothing and they had to beg for everything.

They would probably tell the people about their misfortune, about Herod's persecution from which they had run away. And the Jewish families of the neighbourhood, touched by the story, would perhaps take them into their house until they could find a better place. Later on, little by little, and by dint of sacrifice they would manage to set up their little house and even a small workshop for Joseph and then they would live on his work.

Come; offer your heart again as a shelter to Our Blessed Lady. Envy those good people who were able to console and help the Holy Family in their tribulations. Why do you also not try to be a consoler of Jesus, of Joseph and of Mary whenever they go about unsuccessfully looking for souls wherein to take shelter? Do you not see that this would bring the greatest happiness into your heart?

Lastly, see how God, whilst allowing this trial, fills them with consolation. They labour, they toil, they suffer, but with joy and confidence in God. Their stay in Egypt lasted several years. It is evident that there it was Jesus showed the first charms of His childhood. There He muttered His first words. There He called Our Lady for the first time «Mother». There He uttered the first prayers that She taught Him; and how Our Lady would fall into ecstasies on seeing Her Son join His little hands and pray with great fervour and devotion! There He put on His first childish tunic. There HE played His first games on the banks of the River Nile.

Often He brought Our Lady a bunch of flowers, receiving from Her in return an ardent kiss. What consolations Our Lord pours on the souls that sacrifice themselves for Him. No mother had ever suf-

fered so much, but there was no happier Mother than Mary.

3. The Return

One fine day the Angel appeared again and ordered them to return. Herod is dead. Everything is over. Why do you not more often think that everything passes; that all comes to an end? Very prudently however, St. Joseph does not want to return to Bethlehem lest Archelaus, the son of Herod, were just like his father. Again the Angel appears to Him and tells Him that he has done the right thing. They should remain in Nazareth.

Prudence has never been an enemy of obedience. Express your desires and your difficulties with humility and then like St. Joseph wait with holy indifference for an answer. But do not stick stubbornly to your views. Do not grow disgusted or angry if superiors do not give way to you. Prudence, yes, but at the same time submission.



MEDITATION 50

Life in Nazareth (1)

1. Outstanding Model

The life of the holy family in Nazareth was apparently ordinary. Hidden, of no special value. There is nothing in it to attract the attention of the world. Their neighbours take no notice of them. There is nothing in it spectacular and glamorous. Only silence, obscurity the uneventful routine of ordinary life. Reflect, however, that in Nazareth you have a school of sanctity. That little home in Nazareth is the studio where all great virtues are shaped. There you find all which on earth is great and beautiful in the sight of God. All the saints have gone to Nazareth for lessons. No life of perfection is possible unless based on the study and imitations of Nazareth.

On the other hand reflect that Nazareth contains the greatest part of the life of Jesus. He is our

master and model for about thirty years. He wanted to teach us as much with His practical life as with His teaching. Nothing should then be more familiar to you than the life of Nazareth. There you will find a solution for every problem. Ask yourself indeed, whether you often remember the hidden life of Nazareth, whether you are fond of it, whether you daily devote some thought to the life of fervour which prevailed in the little home of Nazareth.

2. Life of Order

This is the first thing that you must consider in Nazareth: the order that reigned supreme in the family. Contemplate Our Lady, model of order. Contemplate Joseph through his toil and labour, the bread winner of the Family. But it was the mother who directed and regulated everything; and how admirably She did it!

Order means everything in its place and every action being subjected to a rule and to a purpose. To not act prompted by pleasure or displeasure or with fatigue, whether we like it or dislike it, duty being our sole concern. If you are just pushed around by your inclinations and led by your impressions, one day you might be enthusiastic and the next day

tepid. Then you will not feel like doing anything and whatever you do will probably be done badly, ungracefully and unwillingly. Is this not often the case? Now watch the example of Our Heavenly Mother. She always does Her duty, fulfilling exactly at every moment what She expected to do.

3. Perseverance

As a consequence of what we said above you can see the necessity of perseverance. Inconstancy springs up from want of order. Are you not persuaded that perseverance is an essential element of love? Love which lasts but a few days, love which is fickle and whimsical is not real love.

Take then, the pulse of your perseverance and you will be able to measure your love. You will then realise that in order to be constant you must abide by a rule and be subject to order. Make the test of your loyalty.

4. Routine

Yet, there is a difficulty to be avoided. If want of order begets inconstancy, too strict an adherence to order might bring about mechanical routine, namely, the doing of things out of mere, machine-like, robot-

like habit. And this, of course, leads to indifference, to spiritual lukewarmness, to the doing of things without relish and without profit. Do not, consequently, mistake mechanical automatic routines for order.

Your advancement will be great if you do with real fervour whatever you do out of rule. Mechanical routine does to our spiritual life what the moth does to clothes. It spoils everything. A great part of the merit of our actions — and sometimes the whole of their merit — vanishes on account of this accursed mechanical routine. Look at Our Lady in Nazareth. Order, method, rule, exactness and perseverance prevailed there. But there was no mechanical routine. Why? Because She always kept in the presence of Jesus. The presence of God and the presence of Mary are the great means of combating thoughtless routine.

5. Advantages

Now briefly ponder over the great advantages of Order. *Keep order and order will keep thee*, St. Augustin says. Your spiritual life will depend on this order and method in your actions. Moreover, in a life of order, the most beautiful virtues are even unawares put into practice: obedience by never doing our will, restrict-

ing ourselves to doing what is prescribed; humility, since self love is always reluctant to submit to order; submission since we surrender our will to what is the manifestation and penance and that on no small scale.

Remember the saying of St. John Berchmans: *the common life, namely a life of order and of rule, is my greatest penance.* On the other hand the reward of this orderly life of perseverance is a life of real love. Faced with Mary's example see how much you have to do in this matter. Ask Her to let you know its extraordinary importance. Implore the grace of imitating Her orderly exactitude in Nazareth which converted an ordinary simple life into a life of great sanctity.



MEDITATION 51

Life in Nazareth (2)

1. A Life of Obedience

This is a consequence of order. When everybody commands and nobody obeys there cannot be order. Consequently, there must be obedience in order to have a regular and orderly life. Nazareth the model of order is also a model of obedience.

The importance of this life is stressed by the Gospel. Very little is said about the life at Nazareth. Although it embraced the longest period of the life of Jesus yet the Gospel sums it up in two words. But those words underline that the life of Nazareth was all about a life of obedience.

Jesus was subject to His parents. Mary was subject to Joseph and Joseph to the will of God. In this manner in Nazareth everybody obeyed and at no moment did they do their will. They were just bent upon doing God's will through obedience. Go

deeper into this truth and ask Our Lady to give you a practical knowledge of it. Ask Her to teach you to realize that only through obedience can we fulfill the Holy Will of God.

The purpose of our life is to serve God. He who serves does the will of his master. Therefore we have always to do the Holy Will of God. But this will often appear obscure and difficult to know. Sometimes self love blinds us and prevents us from seeing it. At other times the devil with this diabolical cunning tries to obscure it with temptations, taking us thereby away from the spring's source and cause of all sanctity which is the fulfilment of the Holy Will of God. What should we then do? Where ought we to seek the solution? How can we find out what God expects us to do? Only through obedience. When we obey we are not doing the will of a man but that of God, who is commanding us through a man.

2. The Model

There is one great practical lesson in Nazareth. Jesus and Mary do not see in obedience something accidental and transitory, but something essential and abiding. That is why the holy life of Jesus will

always be a model of obedience. Above all to obey, this is the plan and programme of His life. But on the other hand who was He? To whom was He supposed to render obedience? His parents, also very saintly, were still infinitely far from His own sanctity. He knew much better than anyone what He had to do. Yet He wants to know nothing else than that which is commanded to Him by obedience. And our blessed Lady also with such a divine model before Her, how She must have embraced all the desires and orders of the Holy spouse! Live under that humble roof only for one day and you will see how from morning till night there reigns an unalterable peace, a heavenly serenity. All this is the fruit of obedience. What a sight for the Angels of Heaven! How would they fall into ecstasy on seeing the greater submitting to the lesser! What a complete total absolute subjection to the will of one who was representing God although he was inferior to the other members of the Holy family.

3. Qualities of This Obedience

What kind was the obedience there? Externally prompt and internally joyful. It does not suffice to do externally the things that we are ordered. It is

indispensable to have the spirit of internal submission which surrenders our judgment and subjects our will. Moreover, they obeyed in everything whether pleasant or displeasing, great or small in the most minute detail. In matters of obedience everything is important.

Just one detail can spoil it. Moreover, we must obey wholeheartedly, totally, without adding one iota of our own will. How often do you obey in your own way, just as you like, just when it pleases you, just when you think it convenient. You want to obey. Yes, but at the same time you want to do your own will and pleasure. You are no doubt ready to do God's will but without completely shedding your own. It is most pitiful. A very poor show of obedience indeed.

Look to Jesus and to Mary and learn how to obey. Lastly, obedience must be supernatural out of a spirit of faith. Look to God and not to the person who commands. In your superior you must see a portrait of Christ. This picture of God that is your superior may not often be a model of beauty and perfection. It does not matter. Do not obey out of your likings, out of human affections, out of gratitude nor just in an endeavour not to displease the

superior who commands. All that is too human. Obey God and only God and never men as such but only in so far as they are representing God.

4. The Fruits of Obedience

a) its first fruit is the glorification of God. Through obedience our souls enter straight into the Heart of God.

b) The sacrifice and meritorious involved here. There is no more meretricious sacrifice than this, since our freedom and will are offered up to God in obedience.

c) The possession of God. It is through obedience that we possess God.

d) Through obedience we exercise any other virtues: humility, self denial, life of faith. The joy and peace of a tranquil conscience is the fruit of that trust in God which is at the bottom of obedience.

5. Your Own Obedience

Now examine your own obedience before Jesus and Mary. Do you also convert obedience into something accessory and accidental by obeying casually, or when it suits you or when you feel like it or when that which is commanded is pleasing

you? Is that the case, or do you rather strive after making of your obedience something essential and permanent in your spiritual life, by always obeying in all and every detail promptly with submission of judgment and will and out of a spirit of faith? How would Our Lady and St. Joseph dare commend anything to Jesus if they had not previously experienced the joy and pleasure of obeying?

Since you want to be a real slave of Mary ask Her grace of understanding that this slavery consists in the life of obedience. Not in obeying every now and then but in a life of permanent obedience, in embracing that obedience which converts the whole of life.



MEDITATION 52

Life in Nazareth (3)

Another distinguishing mark of the home in Nazareth was that of its humility and obscurity. And that is why we call that period the hidden life of Jesus.

1. Pride with All Its Attendance

Haughtiness, conceit, vanity, self love, a disordinate craving for the praises of men: all that is inborn in human nature. All of us are affected with the same disease. Who does not like to be esteemed and praised? Who does not resent, especially on some occasions, the contempt, the indifference, the coldness with which he is received in society? Recall several instances in your own life. Recollect the intense feeling of humiliation suffered especially when you were entitled to a different treatment.

It is a consequence of original sin. We are all tainted with it; all of us bear the same wound. Begin by being convinced that this is your case also and be persuaded that if you think you are free of it, assuredly pride is more deeply rooted than usual in your soul. Be then convinced of how badly you need to be cured of this disease. Think also how ridiculous is pride? It seeks after the esteem and praise of men. And what is the value of it all? Men are often mistaken; prejudice and even hypocrisy prompt their judgement. How much falsehood rests in the heart of man! How few are those who speak their true feelings with a noble sincerity. And this is what you seek. How stupid it would be for you to attach any importance to human words. They are smoke — mere nothings.

2. The Example of Nazareth

On the contrary see how the little House of Nazareth gives you an altogether different lesson. There human vanity is despised and trampled upon. Jesus hides Himself in the little unknown village of Nazareth, a village which until that moment is not mentioned in Holy Scripture. Jerusalem was a great city of David, but Nazareth was a mere sprinkling of houses, a small place, an unknown spot. And

there the Son of God and Mary lived. Jesus also leads a hidden life for His parents are poor and unknown. Not attracting the attention of anyone. They are just obscure villagers not shining even in Nazareth. They hold no brilliant position of any kind.

Finally, Jesus leads an obscure and hidden life on account of His occupations. He does the usual work of a poor house, going on errands and helping His parents with the housework. Later on He did not go in for higher studies nor did He choose a brilliant career; He became an ordinary artesan, a carpenter. Even here He did not work in precious artistical masterpieces. He merely manufactured common, ordinary everyday objects.

Thus, does Jesus hide Himself. Mary, despite Her beauty and sanctity, despite the smallness of the village, is seen by all merely as a good neighbour, busying Herself in ordinary household duties. She is really the pearl hidden in the bottom of the sea. It would almost seem that God, jealous of His pearl, has hidden it and guarded it against theft.

3. How Long It Lasted

This hidden life lasted until the time came for Jesus to go out and preach abroad. And if that need

had not come Mary would have remained in that hidden life all Her life. Here is indeed a practical lesson. The Son of God is not in a hurry to quit His hiding place. He will only come into the limelight when obedience and the glory of His Father demand it. Would it have not been better for Him to preach, say for six, ten or fifteen years rather than for just three? How many souls would He have converted how many things He could have taught to the world! But what was He doing down in Nazareth for such a long time? Was not that squandering of days and years quite at variance with His work of redemption? Does it not seem undignified for the Messias and Redeemer to spend thirty years apparently doing nothing? What of His mission of redemption? After all, it was for this that He had come into the world. And yet the wisdom of God did not think of it this way. God wanted to give us a supreme lesson of humility. He wanted to teach us how to combat our pride and vanity. Hard is the lesson and little do we profit by it.

4. Obscurity and Silence

In the presence of God go now deeper into the value of obscurity and silence. At the sight of Jesus

and Mary embracing obscurity and silence you should long for naught else. The devil wants to put your merits on show that some thief may steal them, that the merit may evaporate. An uncorked phial of perfume loses its scent.

The imprudent man who ostentatiously displays his jewels will soon have them stolen. Everybody tries to hide his money; nobody makes public the amount he has in the bank accounts. Why therefore should we not be equally reticent with things of spiritual value? To work in silence, unseen and unknown, doing good without receiving any appreciation, any gratitude, is rather hard. It costs dear. To feel isolated, misunderstood, under-rated, ignored is painful to our human nature. True, but go to Nazareth. See Jesus, solitary silent, obscure; a life which was only interrupted by His period of preaching and is now continued in the Holy Eucharist. Look at Mary and ask Her for a share in the hidden charm which this hidden life offers to such souls as are enamoured of it. Souls who want to live for God and alone with God try to hide themselves from the eyes of men.

MEDITATION 53

Life in Nazareth (4)

1. Life of Work

Since the Holy Family was poor their life had to be a life of work. They had no capital to live on. They had to live by the labour of their hands. Joseph and his job, Mary and Her domestic tasks, the child helping both: all were working. Let us meditate on what they wish by this work to teach us.

2. In Creation Work Is a Necessity

Work is something inherent in human nature. Laziness, inactivity, is completely against reason. *Man is born for work as the bird is born to fly*, says Job in the Holy Scripture. Even in paradise God put man into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. After the fall work is also a punishment and thus it keeps its punitive character and causes fatigue. But properly speaking it is the fatigue that

is a punishment of sin, not the work itself. As all of us have sinned no one is exempt from this sanction. Physical and moral labour entails fatigue in the body and in the soul. We must always work to earn food, to preserve our life, even for recreation. Be then persuaded that labour is a duty and cannot be waived. Since God is activity by essence, the more you work, the more rational will you be, the more similar to God. God is pure act, as the philosophers say, namely the greatest and the most productive activity.

3. The Virtue

Labour is above all a virtue:

a) Because work is a veritable penance; appointed and imposed by God Himself it is a very holy and beautiful one. Moreover, it is a penance for each and every moment, or each and every one, without exception. Even the sick man, in some way or other works.

b) While laziness is the mother of all vices, work is the mother of all virtues. It is evident that the idler is more tempted, and more successfully so, by the devil. Work, the harder the better, is a fine preservative against temptation. It weakens our

passions, it suppresses the occasions of sin. Before a busy soul the devil feels bewildered.

c) Labour lastly is a virtue of expiation and atonement. Atonement for sin, the amassing of merits, preservation from falls, these are among the great fruits of labour.

Thank God for having made of such necessary things as work very profitable virtue. He has put it in so many advantages to entice us, while at the same time sweetening the punishment inflicted on us. How can we call work a punishment when it is so profitable? Who will not longingly embrace labour since it is such a source of graces, such a treasury of merits?

4. Work in Nazareth

Work, real work, labour in its strict meaning, then could not be wanting at Nazareth. Labour is not only the peaceful occupation and good use of time, but is above all a laborious and irksome reality, something hard and fatiguing, something demanding effort, sweet toil and hardship.

Such was the work in Nazareth. Little poetical and idyllic. It was not work done merely to kill time, to while it away. No, it was a struggle for exist-

ence; it was a work for life, a striving after the daily bread. They lived on the fruit of their labours for they were humble toilers and bread-winners.

See St. Joseph and the child busy at their monotonous daily tasks, immersed in the heavy and unimaginative routine of a village carpentry shop. Because that is indeed what it was, a rustic carpentry shop where only rough, common, ordinary objects are made. Look at those hands gnarled and calloused by daily labour — the same divine hands that shaped the world. And so too with Our Blessed Lady. Also She after finishing the household work, the washing, the sweeping, and the scrubbing, would go to the spindle and to gain a few coins would do Her spinning. Think it over, meditate on this mystery. The Queen of Heaven working for wages. She does not busy Herself on intricate embroidery nor do Her fine delicate fingers weave gold and silk thread. Her work is the inartistic, rough, unimaginative, monotonous humble work of the poor.

5. Your Own Work

Such must your own work also be. Avoiding idleness is, of course, an obligation; but do not forget that there are two obligations; that there are two

kinds of labour, spiritual and corporal. We must labour at our souls in order to overcome our passion, check our temper, trample our self-love, avoid distractions and make our prayer fruitful. We must labour to exercise virtue, to lead an intense spiritual life and above all persevere in it. All this is labour indeed. And without it nothing can be achieved. Propose to be earnest in this kind of labour, no matter how heavy, unwelcome and fatiguing it may be.

But beside this spiritual labour do not forget bodily work: working at the fulfilment of your duties whatever they may be; not just doing what is pleasant and relaxing, but always doing what is your duty to do, for such is God's will and His glory.

Finally, apply these principles to the works of zeal and the apostolate. Do you always seek the limelight or do you rather prefer solid work for souls? Do you also seek after comfort? Do you seek your own desires and pleasure? Are you inconstant? Then look at Jesus and Mary toiling in Nazareth for so long. Try to learn that lesson and follow that example. Ask the grace of accompanying them in this sublime penance, daily work, at times so hard, so boring and so monotonous.

MEDITATION 54

Life in Nazareth (5)

1. A Life of Prayer

Prayer, the union of the soul with God, is communication and intercourse with divinity. Therefore there is nothing more necessary. God is all. We are nothing. God is the lord and master, immensely rich, powerful, full of bounty. We are poor, miserable and helpless. It is then natural, indispensable to appeal to Him, since without God we can do nothing. And prayer consists exactly in this, in appealing to Him, pleading with Him to grant us what we need. Have you ever reflected on the easy means God has given us to enable us to overcome our weakness and to triumph over our own miseries? Prayer is so easy, so simple and yet so effective a remedy. If the sick had such an easy medicine at their disposal, that is to say, if by merely approaching the doctor they could get cured; do you think there would ever be any sick in

the world? How stubborn we are to disregard this divine means of prayer. How stupid we are not to make use of it more frequently. Without prayer no saint has ever attained sanctity. The greater the spirit and life of prayer, the greater the sanctity. There are saints without the extraordinary gifts of miracles, prophecies, austerities, ecstasies and rapture, but without prayer there are none. However, you need not look at the saints. Just enter in to that school of prayer where the saints learnt this lesson, this school of Nazareth.

2. Continuous Prayer

At Nazareth there was a life of continuous prayer. Noticeable above all their other virtues, was their spirit of prayer. Nay, it was prayer that gave life and tonality to the rest. In many homes there is as much as poverty as at Nazareth; there is a hidden life; there is work; but in none is there such a spirit of prayer. Everything in Nazareth was done in a spirit of prayer. So that prayer never stopped. Prayer sanctifies the most insignificant of all our actions. Nothing is too small or indifferent when done in this way. Eating, sleeping, playing, suffering or enjoying, working or resting becomes a veritable prayer and

what a power it has to sweeten the bitterest things of life! Contemplate Mary toiling at Her work, tired and exhausted, busy working for Her beloved Son. No matter how hard She works, poverty never leaves Her. Yet She is never impatient: She knows where God's will lies and She is so happy to abide by it. She does everything with God and for God, that is to say: for Her everything is prayer. She transforms every action into prayer. That is why She is so happy. She would not exchange Her lot with anyone. She would not leave Her poverty for comfort and riches. What an example of how prayer can transform the world.

3. Fervent Prayer

See Mary also in those moments especially devoted to prayer. It is not a mere interruption of Her work in order to lift Her heart and renew Her most pure intention in the presence of God: in addition She several times a day dedicates some time exclusively to prayer and contemplation. Look at Her. How heaven surveys Her demeanour and the disposition of Her Spirit. Lift up your mind towards Heaven and you will see the whole heavenly court and God almighty Himself delighted with the prayer of Mary.

We see Him receiving the glory that accrues to Him from Her prayer, communicating with Her and increasing Her grace and merits. Is your prayer something of this kind? Do you also render glory to God and joy to the angels with your prayer? Do you merit that God should communicate with you and grant you His graces? How is it that you derive so little benefit from your prayer? Should you not by now be in a higher degree of sanctity? Is your prayer like that of Mary, fervent, humble and constant?

4. Prayer in Common

Not only Mary but all the others who dwelt in Nazareth used to pray both in private and in common. What a sublime sight that of the Holy family at prayer! How pleased God is with prayers said in the home, with family prayer, with prayer said together. Jesus Himself after having practiced it in Nazareth, later taught it to His disciples, advising them; where two or three are gathered together in my name I am there in the midst of them.

Man is by nature sociable. He needs company. He must live in a family, in a society. Whatever his achievements, they must be done with the cooperation of others. Why should we through prayer not

sanctify this life of society? If you have friends with whom you talk, why not help one another to join God? If union is strength, if united we stand, if man joins other men in order to achieve purposes, if single handed we can do little, if divided we fall, why should we not follow the same lines in the matters of the spirit? See how the Church prompts prayer and spiritual life in common.

Religions congregations are an application of the same principle. Try to follow these lines and spread prayer and spiritual life in a family, in the circle of your friends, in the society around you.



MEDITATION 55

Life in Nazareth (6)

1. A Life of Development

The evangelists, so reticent when dealing with the life at Nazareth, do not, however, omit to say that the Child grew and developed. Let us meditate on this mysterious growing. In every kind of life there is growth. In the vegetable kingdom, you know that a plant has taken root and lives from the fact that it increases and grows. So also in the animal kingdom. What would happen if an animal, or a human body, did not grow and develop after having been born? That would be a freak of nature. It would not live. Without doubt life is essentially a growing. And this same principle holds good also for the spiritual life. This, though internal, is also life, and consequently demands development.

Growing is an increasing, an acquiring of some new perfection. Therefore, in the spiritual life there

is no stopping no halting. Not to advance in the spiritual life is tantamount to going backwards. Halting in consequence of lukewarmness or coldness is equivalent to going back. Be not deceived. If you are not advancing you are marching backwards. If you do not increase you are losing ground day by day.

2. The Model

Jesus advanced in wisdom and in grace, says the Gospel. Jesus appeared to grow and advance, yet in reality He was the only One in no position to increase or grow from eternity He possessed all in an infinite degree. Consequently, He could not acquire any new perfection. Yet, since He wanted to be our model and teach us practically that we must grow, He so manifested Himself as to appear to be advancing and growing.

The sun is always the same, it does not increase or decrease, yet its light grows from dawn to midday in intensity and brightness. So did Jesus daily intensify the brightness of some perfection as though perfection were really growing and increasing in Him. How great must be the desire of God that we should grow since His Divine Son, the only one not suscep-

tible of increase, decides on appearing in a constant development. He certainly wants us to imitate Him and to work at our own perfection. Our Lady, the one who drew most profit from the teaching of Jesus, certainly did follow His example. It is sweet for us to think how She every day appeared more graceful and beautiful in the sight of God and of man.

3. How Jesus Grew

a) In His Body — this was practically the only growth open to Him. That tender and delicate body of the Child Jesus every day appeared more robust and beautiful, more fitted for His impending apostolic labours, for His preaching, for His passion. Therefore, even His physical and natural growth tended towards the plan of His redemption, towards the fulfilment of the Will of His Father, towards the salvation of souls. Towards this same end too, must we direct our health, our strength, the whole of our life, even considered from a physical and corporal standpoint.

b) He Grew in Wisdom — this was two-fold: one, His human wisdom by which He appeared to know, every day more and better, all that was necessary for life, for His work and for the purpose of helping

His parents. Moreover, He knew every day better what men are, what is in the human heart, and this knowledge made Him suffer at seeing their inconstancy, their selfishness, their incomprehension of real love. He would see the hearts of all mankind and He would find, alas, a similar substratum also in your own heart. The other was the divine wisdom which every day revealed itself more clearly as for instance when in the Temple it caused the doctors of the Law to admire it. Our Lady derived much fruit from these divine lessons. And you, do you too listen to the inspirations of God? Do you profit by them? As He grew in wisdom day by day, He would do works more and more pleasing to His Father, more and more profitable for us. How great would be His uprightness and purity of intention! What love did He not bring to His actions! Imitate this growing sanctity of Jesus which goes on increasing ever more, until the Eucharist and the Cross, until the end of life.

4. Your Own Growth

Your body no doubt has similarly developed but what about your soul? Can you say it has grown every day, every month, every year? Do you feel it

is indeed, growing? Do you, following St. Peter's invitation, *grow up in grace and in the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ*, strive to grow in the knowledge of Jesus and in that of His Mother? Do you try to strike deeper roots in those two hearts?

If life is growth, can you say that your soul lives, or is it not rather languishing away? In the past were you not more innocent, more simple, more fervent? Indeed, have not your passions, your self-love, your temper, increased in intensity rather than diminished? Have your virtues grown? Ask Our Lady for the grace of growing. May She teach you to advance as fast as She did. Ask Her to teach you lest your soul becomes something monstrous or languishes on the verge of death. Storm the throne of Our Heavenly Mother; ask Her that every day you may increase and advance along the path of sanctity. May She especially give you this lesson during Holy Communion, when She gives you Her Son, the greatest Food on which to feed and grow.

MEDITATION 56

Life in Nazareth (7)

1. The Loss of the Child

The culminating point of this hidden life, and even apparently in contradiction with it, is when Jesus, so obedient, so submissive and so retiring suddenly manifests Himself and, so it would appear, declares Himself independent. Let us meditate on the profound mysteries of this behaviour and its bearing on Mary.

2. He Goes Up to the Temple

Jesus is already twelve. He is no longer a little child. He is an adolescent who with irresistible beauty and the fascination of incomparable charm, draws to Himself the love of all. Look at Him, the desire of the eternal hills. Since He is twelve, He is subject to the Law. As such, He must go to Jerusalem three times a year and take part in the

ritual feasts. Many days before, Mary would so tell Him and He would begin to rejoice and look forward to the journey although He did not reveal what was going to happen.

When the appointed day arrives Joseph and Mary take the Child and set out on their journey. Let us follow them and listen to their conversation. Let us see what they do. Let us feel their fervour as the go to the Temple to pray and offer sacrifice.

Compare this journey with the previous ones. Gone are the hardships and preoccupations of the journey to Bethlehem. The nightmare flight to Egypt is finished. Today they proceed happy and contented and yet it is during this journey that a greater bitterness, a far greater trial than on any previous journey awaits them. Adore the divine plans, respect God's Holy Will, which often, when they least expect it, prepares a trial by sorrow for His dear ones.

3. In the Temple

See them arrive in the Temple, the house of their Father, the place where God dwells and communicates Himself to souls. How pained they feel to witness the abuses committed in the Temple! The want

of respect for the sacred place shown by the shopkeepers and mercenary-minded people who have taken their merchandise and commerce into the sacred premises. Was not Jesus tempted to do now what He did later on, namely, to drive them out at the point of a cracking whip? But His hour has not yet come. How injurious to Jesus is a fault committed in a sacred place.

They enter the Temple and first Jesus and then Mary and Joseph begin to pray. It was their first prayer together in the Temple. Let us join them. Let us keep close to Him. Let us stand close to Our Lady. The Mother does not lift Her eyes from Him but full of love and admiration imitates His way of praying and speaking to God. What does He tell His Father? How great is the fervour of His Heart! How He shares it with Mary and She too is all ablaze with fervour! And then they take part in all the sacred ceremonies with great attention following the development of the liturgy. No vain curiosity, no unnecessary questions, no comment, no frivolous demeanour in the presence of so much splendour. Is it thus, that you too take part in the liturgy or do you occasionally allow yourself some light remark?

And when the Child saw the Paschal Lamb and witnessed its immolation and when He watched the priests gathering its blood in golden vessels in order to pour it on the altar of the holocausts, what would His Heart feel? Nothing foreshadowed the Redeemer and His sacrifice better than the innocent little lamb. Well did Jesus know that blood was too poor and insufficient to wash away our sins and give atonement to His Father. And He would once again repeat in His heart: "My Father, here I am ready, I shall take away the sins of the world." And Mary, His Mother, so used She was to reading that Heart, would certainly guess all the thoughts that were crossing the mind of Jesus. And She too would renew with Her Son the desire of that sacrifice for the salvation of men.

4.The Loss

One would say that God listened to Her prayer; that He had accepted Her immolation and gave Her the chalice of bitterness to sip. When returning home from Jerusalem, the Child through nobody's fault was lost. Mary trusted to Joseph; while Joseph imagined that Jesus was with Mary, for the two were inseparable. But the fact remains that at the

end of the first stage home, God permitted that they should find themselves without the Child. What frightful sorrow! What an excruciating trial for the heart of Our Lady!

When Joseph and Mary realised that the Child was not with any of the group, and when, after having questioned all the returning caravans they had to admit that Jesus had been lost, who could fathom their desolation? O, sword of Simeon! How steadily you penetrate and fiercely destroy the heart of the Mother! Mary without Jesus! The Mother without Her Son! We cannot possibly fathom the magnitude of Her sorrow over that, and experience what Jesus meant for Her: Her Son. Her God, Her All. What would you have done? Thrown the blame on others? Vented your feelings against your neighbour? From Mary comes not a single word of complaint. As for St. Joseph, She says he had done well. She Herself it was that was overconfident and imprudent. She reproaches Herself alone. See Her weep in silence. Yet She gives way to no dramatic exaggerations, the prey of a boundless sorrow! Go you and console Her, go and promise always to share Her sorrows. Promise never by your behaviour to increase Her sufferings, since whatever She suffers, She suffers for you.

MEDITATION 57

The Life in Nazareth (8)

1. The Finding of the Child

It took them three days to find Him. What long days! What long nights! All day long they would turn from one place to another, enquiring here and there. This intense activity would to some extent mitigate the sufferings of Mary. But at nightfall when She would retire to Her rest, tired and exhausted by the sorrow and the day's fatigue, what would She think on finding Herself alone! How Her imagination would picture Jesus, perhaps already suffering His passion and death for men. Accompany your Mother during those terrible nights; try to fathom the depth of Her sorrow at the loss of Jesus. Know how to imitate Her if one day you too are visited by the same tribulation, if you too one day lose Jesus or run the risk of losing Him. At last, the day of rejoicing dawns. Mary and

Joseph come back to Jerusalem, search the court-yards and annexes of the Temple and finally they find their Life! They see Jesus peacefully talking to the doctors. What a variety of feelings floods the heart of Mary. On the one side immense joy because She has found the Child safe and whole, on the other gratitude to God for having granted them again the possession of their Child. Feelings too of admiration and astonishment on seeing their Child, always so modest and humble, entering into public discussion with the doctors of the Law and teaching them. What was the meaning of it all?

2. Material Remonstrances

In fact, Our Lady could not contain Her feelings; and with an immense material love She asked Him *My Son, why hast Thou treated us so? Think what anguish of mind Thy father and I have endured searching for Thee!.... What reason had You to search for Me? Could you not tell that I must needs be in the place which belongs to My Father?*

Mary was unable to recover from Her astonishment on that day. Everything was so extraordinary. How was it that Jesus, Her Jesus, until now so submissive and obedient, He Who had never

given them any motive of complaint could now behave like this? Had He not been aware that He had caused them such cruel torments? What was the explanation? We can easily guess the torture of Her motherly heart which causes Her to give vent to Her feelings. And Jesus up to now silent, now, out of respect for His Mother, speaks and explains.

These are the first words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel. How sublime they are! What a deep mystery they enclose! Whatever He has done, had been done on orders from His Father, before whose Divine Will there is no other course than to obey, even when obedience is bitter and brings with it, as in this case, a trial of suffering. Jesus knew well the anguish of Mary and Joseph, His Heart suffered with theirs; yet because His Father so wanted it, He too desired it.

3. Our Model

Here Jesus gives us a model of the highest virtues. He teaches us that we must obey God rather than man. He shows us how to follow our vocation and divine inspirations always and everywhere. However, much the heart may bleed, we must listen to His invitations wherever He wants, whenever He wants, whatever He wants.

Moreover, we must obey God as He deserves, that is with readiness, energy and exactitude. Very often, strong will power is necessary since only thus can we overcome the difficulties which crop up. Look then at your Model: there you will find the encouragement and steadfastness that you require. Jesus does not sugar-coat His parents' sacrifice. He does not even prepare them for the separation. He does not take one step to meet them when they are in search of Him. And even when they find Him He does not console them with sweet and affectionate words. No, He simply tells them the truth; what has happened is the Will of His Father, Who is their superior and Whose will they must accept. Mary and Joseph bow their heads in humble submission. They speak no further word, put no further question. Meditate on this extraordinary passage of the Gospel and ask Jesus to give you the same steadfastness and the same courage that you too may obey with exactness and humble submission the Holy Will of God.

Here too Mary is a model of great virtues. How well in the hard trial does She bear Her sorrow. Stop to consider Her patience, Her submission to God's will, Her humility, how She deems Herself unworthy to have Jesus; how She blames Herself for His loss.

Admire Her perseverance and activity in the restless search. She would have gone to the end of the world had that been necessary in order to find Jesus.

4. Seeking Jesus

You too must learn how to seek Jesus. You may lose Him through sin, but sometimes even without sin Jesus may hide from you just to try you as His Mother was tried. It is then that the devil will take the opportunity to tempt you with discouragement, with despondency, with tiredness, with mistrust, perhaps with despair.

Look then to Mary. Though She did not find Jesus immediately, yet She did not stop looking for Him. This you also should do. Suffering and sorrow must not diminish the earnestness of your search. On the contrary, you must miss Jesus much more than Mary did. Like Mary you must not stop or rest, until by fervour and perseverance you manage to find Him again. And when we find Jesus again, what joy and happiness comes to us. How spontaneously those words of the Canticle of Canticles spring from our heart: I have found the One that my soul loves. I shall keep Him well and shall never let Him go. Ask Mary to learn how to fulfil the will of God. Implore from Her that

Jesus should never punish you by quitting your heart and hiding away from you. Ask to learn how to work without rest in Her company, since you know well that it is with Her and through Her that Jesus is found and will abide with you forever.



MEDITATION 58

Life in Nazareth (9)

1. Mary and Jesus

We shall try to fathom the kind of relation which existed between Jesus and Mary, during the thirty years hidden life of Nazareth. It was, first of all, the relationship of mother and son. Jesus, the Son of God, was also the Son of Mary and was to Her all that a good son can be towards his mother. Mary had to do for Him all the services which a mother does for Her child. And the Child Jesus, like any other, had to depend on His Mother to such an extent that the life of one was the life of the other. Mary lived all for Jesus while Jesus was wholly dependent on Mary, His Mother. What a sweet compenetration of lives between Mother and Son!

Everything in the life of Jesus had its repercussions in the heart of Mary. It would sometimes be a joy, a desire, or an anxiety, a loving caress, or an

effort; or as in the case with all the earthly mothers a preoccupation to feed Him, clothe Him and rear Him. Only all in a way far more loving, more tender and devoted. None even among the children of kings and emperors had ever enjoyed such exquisite care as Jesus received from His most loving Mother.

2. The Son of God

On the other hand, Mary saw in Jesus not only Her own Son but also the Son of God. Hence all Her affection, immense though it was, was always mixed with the highest respect and veneration.

It is a sublime inference that God placed in the heart of the Virgin Mother all the love, all the fond tenderness that the whole of mankind ought to have had for Jesus. Mary Herself loved Her Son more than the rest of all creatures. From the very first moments with Her ardent love She was able to atone for all the forgetfulness and ingratitude of all men who out of ignorance or malice would not accept their Saviour. Thus, Mary in Her heart represented all mankind and on their behalf She performed the functions of Mother, since indeed, Her Son was not for Her only but for all of us. He equally belongs to us all.

3. Intimate Life

Finally, as regards this maternal function of Mary, think also that all the circumstances of Her life contributed as we can imagine to render it closely intimate. Since the Holy Family were poor, they could afford no servants; consequently, Mary Herself had personally to look after Her Son, even to the most minute details. God's providence did not want any other hands save the immaculate hands of Mary to handle the body of Christ. Consider how Her life and His were entwined. All Her moments are for Him. She spares no troubles or fatigues to tend Him. She feeds Him, She clothes Him, She washes Him, She carries Him in Her arms. She did everything for Him. Not once did She ever call on anyone for assistance or help of any kind. And verily, who could have done it as well as She? And because She was the Mother of God, Our Lady cooperated and took part in all the mysteries of Christ's hidden life. No detail escaped Her; She observed everything attentively. As the Gospel tells us, She imprinted everything in Her heart. And when alone, She would meditate and ponder over all that She had seen and heard and from all the actions and teachings of Jesus She would derive fruit. How deep would She penetrate into

all those mysteries! How many delightful hours of spiritual enjoyment She would spend meditating on the childhood and on the hidden life of Jesus! How much She knew! Of how many things was She the only witness! If the heart of a mother remembers the most insignificant details of the life of her children, how would Mary guard all those treasures in the treasury of Her heart?

4. Our Model

Mary is the model who teaches us to know, to study, to contemplate Jesus. Consider Her in those continuous meditations. Jesus absorbs the whole of Her activity, Her entire life. Every minute of Her day. And how could it be otherwise? She had before Her eyes the dearest object of Her heart. When She looked in the face of Her Son, She saw in Him God. She would rejoice in the charms of Her Baby; in later years She would find joy in the manly beauty of Christ Adolescent.

How Her motherly heart would rejoice on seeing the divine Baby sleeping quietly in His poor cradle! She could contemplate that adorable face, kiss it, know every inch of it. In that little Child, so poor and so helpless, She would ever see the Infinite, the

Eternal, the Omnipotent, the Majestic, the Uncreated Wisdom of the Godhead. Step by step She watched the development and growth of that most holy humanity. She could see how the face of Jesus would become more and more like Hers. Everybody in Nazareth would tell Her so. And Her heart would jump with ineffable joy whenever anyone remarked how the Baby was like His Mother. Oh, happiest of mothers! And how Her heart corresponded to those lovely remarks! How She would draw from them sentiments of admiration, of joy, of love and praise, of gratitude to God for having made Her, God's handmaid, to be the Mother of His Son! What prayers would She then raise to God for all men and also for you! She unceasingly offered Herself up to Jesus for us, while too She offered us all to Jesus, imploring countless graces for us.

Finally, to the Eternal Father She would offer Her Jesus for the salvation of mankind. Thus, did Mary occupy Herself during the thirty years of Her life at Nazareth Devote your meditation to this intimate life of the Mother and the child. Beg of them a little corner that you may share in the silence, the peace, the happiness of Nazareth. Ask Jesus that since you are also a child of Mary you too may take after Her.

Ask the grace of imitating Him, that studying Jesus you may know, love and serve Him as Mary did; that He should fill your mind and your heart, and become the sole aim and object of life.



MEDITATION 59

The Wedding of Cana

At the end of His hidden life at Nazareth Jesus inaugurates His public life. His first prodigious manifestation is the miracle of Cana, which was performed at the intercession, of rather we might say, on a desire from of His Mother.

1. The Invitation

We are not certain who these newly-weds were. It is likely they were some near relations of Mary since She found it convenient to accept their invitation to the wedding. It is important to remember that the invitation was in the first place addressed to our Lady, Jesus being invited because He was Her Son. A circumstance of great importance, for it tells us that Jesus likes to appear in the company of His Mother, that He enters most willingly into those hearts where His Mother is already dwelling. Keep this in mind, es-

pecially when you go to Holy Communion. The presence of Mary is your best preparation.

Note also some other circumstances. By their behaviour Jesus and Mary tell us, for instance, that virtue must be something lovable, not forbidding or misanthropic. How cheering was the presence of Mary and Jesus at a wedding banquet. Surely, spirituality is not variance with the legitimate visits, with honest amusements, with family feasts, especially if taken that Mary and Jesus too are there to sanctify the occasion with their presence.

2. The Banquet

Look at Jesus and Mary as they participate. All eyes are fixed on them. No affectation or posing, just exquisite courtesy and amiable in demeanour, and at the same time unaffected and modest. Gentility and courtesy combined. Then wine runs short, but nobody realizes it. None save Mary who noticed it at once. What a penetrating and subtle sight was Hers! Nothing escapes Her observation. The waiters were trying to cover up the shortage that it might pass unnoticed, but Mary cannot be deceived. Jesus also noticed it, He neither said nor did anything. He just let Mary act. He wanted the initiative to be Hers.

3. The Words of Mary

Mary could not stand aside and do nothing. She had been invited by the bride and bridegroom and must do something. Her heart urged Her to action. Nobody says anything to Her. She it is who, on finding some suffering and sorrow, moves unbidden into action. From the heart of Mary learn bounty, mercy and delicacy and at the same time trust in Her, since She will certainly behave in the same manner towards you.

Then it was that Mary, turning to Jesus, whispered: They have no wine! Words so simple and yet so eloquent. Neither an order nor a prayer. Just the bare statement of a need. Yet She does not doubt that Jesus will see to it. She need not ask or order. She knows it is enough to express a desire and Jesus will understand; for a son the desire of the mother is a law, not a command. However, Jesus apparently seems on this occasion to refuse the request and answers: What is it to you and to me? It was as though He said This is not our banquet, we are not giving it, so it is not our concern. Let those concerned think of it. Moreover, is not this lack of wine just a mere trifle?

Did it much matter that they should run short of wine just towards the end of the banquet, when every-

body had already drunk to their heart's content? Had it been the beginning, then it would have been something serious but surely not now. Moreover, since this is exclusively a simple village wedding why should there be any hurry to perform a miracle? And as if all these reasons were not enough, Jesus said: My time has not come yet, in other words, this is neither the time nor the place appointed by my Father to start working miracles and manifest my divine mission to the world.

4. The Miracle

All this did not obviously discourage Mary. Her first attempt had failed. To us, humanly speaking, the difficulties mentioned by Jesus were such that it were better to keep silent. But Mary did not take it this way. Just as though Jesus had said precisely the contrary of what He had said, just as though He had explicitly stated that He was ready to do whatever She wished, Mary calls the servants and issues to them peremptory orders: *Do whatever He tells you*. Thus, there was no escape for Jesus: He was compromised. He had to do something. And so it was that in obedience to the will of His Mother He performed His first and most spectacular miracle: that of the conversion of water into wine.

5. Mary's Power

Great was the miracle of the wine, but greater still was this miracle of the power of Mary, this mystery by which God surely had no other intention than to show us the extent of Mary's power. All that Jesus says, all the difficulties that He brings forward, serve only to show how powerful Mary is. Does not that phrase or Our Lord, *My hour is not come yet*, serve to show that even God's plans seem liable to revision at the behest of Mary? Wonderful indeed!

What must Mary's position be in front of God since such is Her power? Through the fervent prayers of Mary the hour of the Incarnation was anticipated. Thanks to Her expectation and desire to see the Redeemer was the hour of the divine birth hastened. And now once more the clock is put forward and the hour of Jesus' public manifestation is anticipated. In Mary the Incarnation takes place. In Her the birth of Jesus proceeds. With Her the thirty years of hidden life are spent. At Her behest the beginning of His public life and the performance of His first miracle are timed.

What does this mean but that the Son of God would do nothing without Mary. Are you not filled

with awe and admiration on realizing that God associated Mary with all His works?

If things stand thus, your own salvation and sanctification depend on Mary, must come from Mary, must be entrusted to Mary. Entrust then your soul to Her. How sure is Her trust in Jesus. Cana was the first miracle. She had probably not seen Him perform any so far, yet what faith and what confidence! How certain She is when She calls the servants and orders them about. Trust yourself then without fear to the arms of such a powerful Mother; tell Her your miseries, your needs. She who could not abide the scarcity of virtues in your heart, provided you appeal to Her and ask from Her the necessary help.



MEDITATION 60

Mary in the Public Life of Jesus

Once Her intervention at Cana is over, our Blessed Lady vanishes again from the pages of the Gospel to reappear at Our Lord's tragic end, in His passion and death on the Cross. Let us however, try to reconstruct Our Lady's activity during the last three years of Our Lord's public life.

1. Union in Spirit with Her Son

Above all, we cannot doubt that the life of Mary continues to be a life of most perfect union with Jesus. Try to imagine that moment of separation, when Jesus leaves His home for His public life. How sadly but how resignedly would Our Lady have Her last repast with Him. She packs His clothes. She gets His sandals ready for His long journeys. She accompanies Him for a long time on the road until Jesus tells Her to continue no further. They

embrace and depart. What a lot of sorrow for Mary! How empty it is now in Nazareth! The house, the workshop, everything in the home proclaims His presence. Yet all is empty, all is silent, all is sad. Mary is not resigned to be separated from Jesus for without Him She cannot live. And so though She has let Him go and She is deprived of His physical presence, yet spiritually they are always together. Day and night wherever He may be Mary is with Him, in spirit. She thinks always of Him: what is He doing, what is He thinking, of His powerful love! So powerful indeed, that the two souls cannot even be separated by death. Is your love for Jesus of this kind? Are you like your Heavenly Mother in this compenetration with Him?

2. Cooperation in His Messianic Work

All Her life Mary actively cooperated with the mission of Jesus. Whilst He was preaching, toiling, or journeying, Mary was praying and suffering, Her prayers and sacrifices achieving many conversions among those listening to Jesus. If, thanks to Her intervention, water was changed into wine, would not also the miracle of conversions be brought about also through Her?

It is true that Jesus was not in need of His Mother’s prayers to make His preaching fruitful, but He wanted Her to be associated in His work to teach us that the active life must always be accompanied by the contemplative; that conversions are as much the result of their words as that of the prayers of many hidden souls, known only to God. Love this beautiful apostolate of prayer. You may not be able to preach or do wonderful things. You may not be able to perform miracles, but like Mary you will always be able to mortify yourself in silence, in prayer, to sacrifice yourself for souls. One day you will learn the result of this magnificent apostolate. Let Mary even in this be your model. Truly She, in this sphere also, can be called the Queen of the Apostles.

3. Consolations and Disappointments

This portion of Mary's life abounded in consolations as well as sorrows. After all, man's life on earth is a mixture of joys and sorrows, of smiles and tears. Possibly more of the latter than of the former. So it was with Mary. How great was Her consolation when She heard of the prodigies worked by Jesus, when She Herself watched the

crowds thronging around Him, listening to Him, acclaiming Him; when She was made acquainted with the apostles and disciples who were escorting Him; when She received news of His triumphs over the souls of sinners by converting them. And over the Scribes and Pharisees by confounding them. How great was Her joy when She Herself could hear some of His speeches. How great Her happiness when Jesus, exhausted by His labours, would come for a little rest to the little House of Nazareth. How She would wipe the sweat off His face. How lovingly She would serve the food Her adorable hands had prepared for Him. What intimate moments of holy and lively conversation were theirs in those days! How happy She felt in the company of Her adorable Son!

But alas! How deep was Her sorrow when She learnt of the jealous rage of His enemies, of the perfidy of their insidious questionings, of their relentless questings and spying, of their ignominious expulsion of Jesus from the ravine, of the attempt to stone Him to death. How much She suffered on realising the hardness of their hearts, the malice of their minds, the clumsiness and slowness of those apostles and disciples who

could not bring themselves definitely to acknowledge and accept Him.

4. God's Will

Finally, Her life was one of exact fulfilment of God's will. Without this there is no sanctity. Remember the two occasions on which Jesus during His public life spoke of His Mother. Once was when He was told that His Mother was calling Him and Jesus answered: Who is my mother? The one who does the will of my father is my mother, and my brother and my relations.

The other is when that good woman exclaimed: Blessed be the womb that bore Thee and Jesus replied: More blessed is still the one who listens to the word of God and follows it! Learn this lesson. This is the only thing great in the presence of God. His own Mother’s greatness if based on the fact that She was the one Who best fulfilled the Will of God. It was not enough for Her to have borne Him in Her womb, to have given Him His human life.

It was necessary that She should excel in the exact fulfilment of the Will of God thus, She, being both His Mother and the best executor of God's

Will was doubly entitled to the name of Mother and for this was She great and blessed.

This is the lesson that we must draw from these words. You cannot imitate Mary in Her Motherhood, but you can and must imitate Her in Her perfect fulfilment of the Will of God. Ask this grace from Her, implore the light always to know God's Holy Will and the grace to ignore you own. Ask for grace and strength to follow the Holy Will without hesitation.



MEDITATION 61

Mary and the Passion

1. The Hour

The hour appointed by His Heavenly Father for the consummation of the sacrifice had struck. His obedient Son will not retard it for one single moment. Well did He know what the arrival of that hour entailed for Him, but far from being dismayed, He with immense joy mixed with deep sorrow will advance towards the sufferings of His passion. The first step is that of taking leave of His Mother. How can we describe or even imagine that scene? Jesus has called Mary apart and begins to describe the Will of His Father.

Listen to His words. Try to imagine the reasons on which He bases His determination to face death. He endeavours to console His Mother's lacerated heart. His Father had decreed these sufferings necessary to satisfy the divine justice, to redeem the world, to destroy the empire of sin. What a terrible idea

would Our Lady have of sin when She understood what it would cost to destroy it! Try to penetrate this point deeply. What a horrible thing sin must be! How displeasing it must be to the Heart of God since His justice cannot be appeased except by the sacrifice of His own Son. And in order that His Mother might not be taken cruelly unawares by all the tragic events that were to come, and also in order that She should immediately share the sufferings He was about to undergo, He gives Her a detailed account of His passion; of His capture in the garden, of the betrayal of Judas, of the injustice of the several courts, of the terrible scenes at the Praetorium.

With a quiver in His voice He tells Her of the horrible tortures of the scourging, of the crowning with thorns, of the way to Calvary, of the cross on His shoulders, of the crucifixion and finally, how after three hours of frightful agony He would die, insulted and derided even in His last moments. Jesus had bitter hours to spend in His passion but this one was certainly not the most bearable. How much He must have suffered since He Himself was the instrument that tore the heart of His Mother, since every word of His drove the sword of sorrow deeper and deeper into Her heart.

2. Our Lady

How great must have been Mary's suffering as She heard the terrible story told by Her Son! She shuddered with horror at the description of every new torment which He would have to bear. Even the very thought was unbearable. How could She face it? Was it not better to die before it came to pass? Why did not God the Father bestow on Her the favour granted to St. Joseph who was taken from this world before witnessing such scenes? But whilst these sentiments passed naturally though Her mind, She felt at the same time that such was the Will of God. The supernatural takes the upper hand. Our Lady accepts the cup of sorrow and sacrifice that Her Son was offering to Her, not only with resignation but even joyfully. How immense is the sorrow of that Mother's heart. Yet how much more admirable is the fortitude and courage which leads Her on the way of suffering in the footsteps of Her Son. Meditate on this.

In the face of this example think of your own cowardice in front of suffering. Feel ashamed, ask pardon, implore grace to change, and pray that you may have the fortitude of the Mother and of the Son.

3. The Blessing

Then Jesus on His knees asks His Mother's blessing and takes leave to start His passion. Consider the circumstances which render so painful the departure. There has never been a separation as cruel as this. The natural love and the union of hearts between Jesus and Mary was something extraordinary. How could they wrench themselves apart! And they were parting in order to suffer. The climax of their sacrifice was not a mere resigned acceptance of sorrow but the joyful, free and contented acceptance of it. And Jesus by imploring Her blessing asks from Mary Her assent. How the hand of Mary would tremble with emotion as She raised it to bless Her Son, knowing as She did that thus She was giving Him permission to be delivered to torture and death!

4. Your Hour

Remember that even you too will have your hour. For you also, the hour of suffering and strife, trial, sorrow and death must sometime arrive. How do you make ready for those decisive hours, especially the last? Is your life a preparation for that hour? Are you not squandering the graces which

the Lord is daily bestowing on you that you should sanctify yourself even at the cost of sacrifice? Do you play the coward and flee suffering?

Look at Jesus and at His sorrowful Mother and learn how to tread the path of sacrifice and mortification. Give a thought to Mary's blessing of Jesus. You also must ask Her blessing as well as leave of those to whom you owe obedience. You must never, not even when it is a question of self-sacrifice, go your own way. Often, perhaps, this dependency will render your mortification greater and your humiliation more costly, but that is precisely what Jesus desires from you.

We do not know for certain what share Our Lady took in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. We do not even know whether She was in the Supper Room at all that evening; whether She received Holy Communication or not, together with the other Apostles. Yet we know how close are the links that unite Her to the Holy Eucharist.

MEDITATION 62

Mary and the Eucharist

1. Mary's Gift

The Holy Eucharist is Mary's gift "par excellence". Man absolutely needs God. By force of a natural instinct he seeks God; and if he fails to find Him he shapes Him with his hands as did the poor pagans when manufacturing their idols. God granted us the grace of satisfying this need, first of all by means of the Incarnation and then by means of the Eucharist.

He came down from Heaven to earth and became just like one of us so that we could see Him, know Him and love Him. But this was not enough for His love, He wanted to give us more, and decided to humble Himself to the point that we could touch Him, eat Him, be fed on Him, and all this is not just for a few days or for a certain season, but for ever through the Incarnation. He took a human body and dwelt amongst men; but only for a short

time. He lived only in Palestine and only for about thirty three years. How short a period for the whole of mankind! That is why He devised a way by which He can be with us all, everyone of us, really present, closely united, through the most intimate and perfect union that can exist, which is that of assimilation, whereby the food becomes one with the eater. And this prodigy has been worked by Him to last until the consummation of time.

Therefore the Holy Eucharist is a continued Incarnation. It is the practical application of the Incarnation to each and every one of us. In this way God satisfies that craving we have for Him. And this gift of the Incarnation, by whom was it granted? It was by the Eternal Father, of course. It was the Eternal Father who donated this gift; but He did it through the ministry of Mary. It was She who gave it forth to the world. And if the Holy Eucharist is the continuation of the Incarnation, it is clear that the Eucharist is the continuation of the gift of Mary. She keeps on giving us Jesus daily as She one day gave Him to us in Bethlehem. Adam caused our ruin when eating the fruit given to him by the woman. *The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion, she it was who offered me fruit from the tree*

and so I came to eat it. So did Adam sin. We can equally say: "Lord, the woman Thou gavest us as Mother has given us and keeps on giving to us the blessed fruit of Her womb, Jesus, and therefore we live and are fed on Him."

2. The Sacrament of Mary

The Holy Eucharist could thus be named. In the other sacraments She has no share but in this She has, and a most important one too. The flesh of Jesus says St. Thomas, is but the virginal flesh of Mary. It is She, therefore, who provided the matter necessary for the sacrament. The Virgin with Her fiat brought the Son of God from the bosom of His Father to Her own immaculate bosom. The priest at the Consecration works a similar miracle and into his hands the Son of God, already the Son of Mary, descends. The words of the priest are, therefore, like an echo of the words of Mary. Their prodigious operation is just like the continuation of the wonders of Nazareth. Rightly has it been said that the Eucharist is the continuation of the work of Mary.

Mary's greatest concern was that of loving and adoring Jesus as Her Son and Her God. Jesus became a child in order to draw us with His charm and love to the love of God. But, in fact, how many came to

know and love that Divine Child? Mary was the model of the souls enkindled with the love of Jesus. She loved Him with such an immense intensity. Now, in the Eucharist, Jesus becomes the bread and food of men. What for? Again, in order to capture our love. He annihilated Himself when He became a man. More effectively so, He annihilates Himself when becoming our bread. But in this annihilation He scarcely finds any real love and true affection except that of His Mother. She alone with all Her love is capable of compensating this humiliating annihilation. When you love Jesus in the Eucharist, think that you are continuing that poem of love which Mary began at Bethlehem. Now as then, most men neither love Him, nor care to thank Him for what He has done for them. Now also, as then, somebody should volunteer to make up for this ingratitude. Of old it was Mary. Now it must be you with Her.

3. The Consolation of Mary

How sad all this would be for the heart of Mary! When She thought of that charming Divine Child unknown to some, rejected by others, persecuted in His very cradle, and when She saw in Her Son the Son of God, what would not Her sorrow be on think-

ing upon that cult of adoration that He deserved! It is evident that neither in His private life nor in His public ministry, and much less in His passion and death, did Jesus ever receive the divine honour to which He was entitled. And this, of course, was a matter of sorrow for Our Lady. Instead the Eucharist consoles Our Lady in so much as Her Jesus is honoured in the very same Body, in the very same Flesh and Blood which He took from Her. Today our Heavenly Mother is satisfied and consoled when She sees souls flocking to the Eucharistic altar, to honour, adore and love the Most Holy Host of our Tabernacles. Do you give this consolation also to your Mother and at the same time render due honour to Jesus? Do you think you do indeed, fulfil this duty though your Eucharistic life? Is your soul satisfied with it?

4. Mary's Communion

While it is not certain that Mary received the Holy Communion in the Last Supper, we cannot doubt that She would very often receive Holy Eucharist from the hands of St. John the Evangelist. The virgin Apostle was giving communion to the Virgin of virgins. What a sublime sight! What a communion! How willingly would Jesus en-

ter the soul of Mary! If He had chosen Her most pure womb for His incarnation, would He not now choose Her heart for His dwelling? How would Our Lady prepare Herself for the Communion! What would be Her thanksgiving! If St. Aloysius used to spend the whole week thinking of Holy Communion, and used to devote three full days to preparation and another three to thanksgiving, what would Mary do? Whenever you approach the Holy Eucharist, imitate Her in Her fervour. Receive it with Mary and like Mary. The whole of your life should be spent in intimate intercourse with the Holy Eucharist.



MEDITATION 63

The Agony in the Garden

1. On the Way to Gethsemani

Jesus has just completed the ineffable, holy Mystery of the supper Room. His hour is approaching. Then full of courage and determination, He starts on His way to Gethsemani. He knows He will never return. He can count the hours of freedom that still remain.

Within a few moments the blood-drenched drama will start. Because He knows it, His heart is in the throes of unspeakable suffering. *My soul is very sad unto death.* That immensity was too well grounded. He could see the Jews arranging to buy Him as though He were a despicable object. Especially He could see Judas carrying through his treachery to the last. He could see all that was awaiting Him. And although He was God, He was also man, and thus had to bear indescribable tortures in His loving and tender Heart.

The same tortures were present in the heart of Mary. In spirit the mother accompanied Him everywhere, sharing His sufferings, partaking of His anxieties and sorrows. Perhaps by revelation She knew what Judas was plotting. Perhaps She knew how he would decide to give the final blow that very night. And knowing and contemplating every one of these circumstances Her heart was torn by sorrow. Although far from Jesus in body, She was closely united with Him in spirit. How admirably did She penetrate into the reason and cause of the mortal sadness of the Divine Heart!

2. The Prayer

Once in the Garden, Jesus leaves His Apostles and withdraws to pray alone. The whole weight of that black, sad night falls on Him. See Him lying on the ground, borne down, overwhelmed by a weight which He cannot bear. That weight was the sins of mankind. That weight was your sins. And how heavily do they weigh down on the shoulders of the Saviour. They beget anguish in His soul which goes on increasing and increasing until it becomes a real agony. What a struggle takes place in His heart! Regard Him clearly and

try to fathom something at least of His horrible sufferings.

Then lift your eyes and see in the house of Bethany, or perhaps in the same supper room, a similar scene taking place. Our Heavenly Mother also has fallen to the ground in prayer. Her heartbeats synchronise with those of Her son. She cannot do anything else than what Her Son is doing. What a frightful night!

How long are its hours! Impossible to sleep. Even resting is out of the question. It is a night of struggle and of agony. A night of prayer. But what a tender, fervent, loving prayer is that which Mary raises for us! She does not ask the Eternal Father to spare His Son. She does not refuse the cup of sorrow, She only wishes the fulfilment of His Will which She accepts, immensely painful though it be. She implores pardon for the world. Pardon for each and every one of us. She begs that the sufferings of Her son which have just started may not be useless for souls. That we may know how to profit from the passion and death of Jesus, from the great graces which through them He has merited for us.

And the agony of Jesus continues. His Heart, no longer able to bear so much sorrow, breaks forth into

a torrent of blood. His cold and abundant sweat of agony is now a sweat of blood. It is a Divine Blood that flows down in abundance over His body, soaks His clothes and penetrates the ground. See the astonishment of the angels of God at that sight. See Mary. She also follows that agony, gauges the intensity of the torture, watches the first stage of immolation, the first shedding of the Blood of the supreme Sacrifice. What will the Mother of God do? In the midst of Her sorrow She acknowledges that Blood to be the Blood of God. She stoops and collects some, kisses it and adores it. She is bathed in the redeeming price of our salvation; the first to profit by that Divine Blood. All that She has received, Her immaculate purity, Her fullness of grace, Her immense sanctity, all is the fruit of that Divine Blood.

The Apostles have fallen fast asleep during prayer. But Mary is awake. She does not waste such precious moments. She does not abandon Jesus even for an instant. Jesus might lament that none of His well-beloved disciples accompanied Him in His agony; but such was not the case with His Mother. From Her retreat, She follows step by step the development of the scene and shares the sufferings of Jesus, drinking together with Him the chalice of sorrow.

3. The Capture

The prayer of Jesus is over. And then, with determination, with generosity and courage He calls His disciples, and at their head goes to encounter His enemies, not in order to offer resistance and defend Himself but just to deliver Himself into their hands. Now see Jesus being roughly tied. His executioners tighten His fetters. But go also into the Heart of Jesus and see there another executioner, namely, His love which binds Him much more tightly and violently. Jesus was a victim and a slave of His love. *Sic Deus dilexit mundum! He loved me and gave Himself for me!* St. Paul would later exclaim.

When our Lady saw Him so cruelly bound, Her anxiety increased. What was going to happen to Him? What were they going to do to Her Jesus? And He is bound in such a manner for your sake. Look at Him well. Ponder what this means; bound for you, which means that not only does He let Himself be bound in order to suffer for you or in your place, or for your sake, but it also means that often you yourself are the one who binds His hands. Are you aware of what this means?

There is nothing which so binds the hands of Jesus as ingratitude, coldness tepidity, want of cor-

respondence to His grace, in other words, sin! Just guess, if you can, how many times Jesus wanted to bestow great graces on you; wanted to shower favours and benefits on you; and you by your behaviour bound His hands. He wanted to sanctify you but you would not let Him; you would just obstruct Him. Come, then, bind yourself to Him with loving fetters that you may never lose Him anymore and you may repeat with the Canticle of Canticles: *I found Him whom my soul loves, I held Him and would not let Him go.* Beg of Our Blessed Lady that this grace may be granted to you.



MEDITATION 64

Mary in the Passion

1. At the Scourging

After having spent the night in prayer, comforted and strengthened by it but still with Her eyes tearful and Her face sorrow stricken, Our Blessed Lady emerges at the break of day in search of Her Son. Her heart is not content merely to follow His sufferings only from afar.

She must go wherever He goes. We know no details of this episode nor do we know where and when She found Him. Was it at the house of Pilate? Was it, perhaps when going to, or returning from, the palace of Herod? Was it perhaps, when the people were already preferring Barabbas to Him? Be it as it may, Her meeting with Her Son must have been a terrible shock to Her heart. She could hardly recognise Him. How terribly changed! And all in a few hours! How grievously disfigured! His face swollen

from the blows received in the house of Annas. The blows dealt by the soldiers on the previous night had caused that divine beauty to fade away from the *most beautiful of the sons of men*. And yet all this was but the beginning. The horrible and barbarous torturers started at the scourging. The private revelations of St. Bridget have it that Our Blessed Lady was present at this torment. Pause to consider what this terrible passage of the Gospel has to tell to your heart. First of all, ask yourself what would Our Lady feel when She heard the sentence ordering the scourging. How did She feel when She saw the preparations being made? What were Her thoughts when She heard the wild cries of the torturers inciting one another, challenging one another as to who would deal the heaviest blow! Stand by the side of Our Lady, watch Her grow intensely pale, hear the panting of Her heart which due to the violence of its beating seems to jump from Her breast. See Her close Her eyes not to see the awful sight; then open them again, unable, despite Herself, to keep them closed.

She sees Jesus roughly handled by the executioners. They impudently tear His garments from Him. You cannot understand what happened then

in the heart of Mary. If you should realise what modesty meant for Her, only then could you fathom what She must have felt on seeing Her son exposed to that multitude, the target not only of blows and scourging, but of mocking, jeering and laughter, of vulgar sarcastic jokes.

Jesus is already tied to the pillar. The torturers are on either side and then, at a signal, they with all their might unleash vigorous blows. Jesus shudders and in order not to break out into cries of pain He clenches hard His teeth. He lifts His eyes to Heaven with an indescribable look of suffering. Mary sees this all.

From private revelations we are told that She fainted and at the first blows fell unconscious, Go close to Her, take Her in your arms, but do not take your eyes from Jesus and be astonished that you also do not faint or die of sorrow at this scene. The two torturers have been relieved. Two more come, then another two, they are wearied after the effort of scourging Jesus and His body is one horrible wound. The flesh has been torn from the bones, contemplate that body so broken and think*: "And all this for what and for whom?"* Remember all the sins of impurity in the world and ask yourself who de-

serves this punishment. Who should have borne these cruel whips?

2. The Crowning with Thorns

Jesus tries to rest and recover His strength but there is no time for rest: He has still much more to undergo. Only demons from Hell could have suggested to those soldiers the mockery of the crowing with thorns. Hear the laughter and clapping of hands with which the diabolical idea is received and see how they hasten to put it into practice. Someone brings out a dirty piece of purple rag; another makes a sceptre from a short cane, others weave a crown and then they again strip Jesus.

They seat Him on a stone, the purple rag around His shoulders, the cane in His hands. The moment of the crowning arrives. Amongst jokes and infernal mockery with grand ceremonial they place the crown on His head tightly and hammer it into position with sticks onto His Sacred Head. What suffering must that cause. Jesus closes His eyes, and tears mixed with blood flow in abundance down the face.

Now see the sacrilegious comedy they are going to stage. He has been crowned king. They come

forward, bend render Him obeisance. They bend their knees before Jesus and some of them give Him a slap, some spit upon Him, others pull His mantle and whisper some offensive pleasantry. Finally, some take the cane from His hand and strike His head with it. Did Our Lady witness this scene? Did She know what they were doing with Jesus? Could She have the heart to bear all that? Great miracle it was, indeed, that She did not die of sorrow.

Certainly did She at least witness the scene of the Ecce homo! Present yourself there with Our Lady. Look at Her face. How must She feel? What is going to happen in the square when Jesus appears? Hear the mob demanding His death. Speak with Our Lady. What have you to tell Her?

3. The Death Sentence

Pilate cowardly surrenders to the shouts of the crowd and consequently sentences Jesus to death. The people cheer the sentence and clap their hands. Mary also hears the sentence. You also hear it. And what would you do? Jesus is sentenced to death! He dies, and you can still live? How would Jesus and Mary receive that sentence? And how do you hear it, if you think that on it your salva-

tion depends? What sentiments of gratitude and at the same time what deep sorrow should fill your heart!

Look at Jesus barely able to stand, making an extreme effort and throwing Himself forward eagerly to meet the cross that is brought to Him by the executioners. See Him well: How He embraces it as if it were something long desired and dearly loved. He does not want anybody else to carry it for Him. He will place it on His own shoulders.

What generosity, what true love is that of Our Saviour! But now Mary has something to say. Listen, She wants something from you. She wants you to acknowledge Jesus as your King. She wants Him to be the only one reigning in your heart. She wants that nobody, not even yourself, should occupy the place that corresponds to His. She wants you to be generous in sacrifice. She wants you not only to accept but also to love, and to look for, the cross. That the Cross should be your happiness. That you should bear it with constancy, with perseverance to the last. And She adds that She will help you to do so. Finally, She wants you to realize what sin is. And to atone for your sins with penance and fervour. Furthermore, She asks you

to make amends to Jesus for the sins of the whole world. She expects you not to be a coward, ungrateful, unfaithful in front of a love as great as that of Jesus.







MEDITATION 65

The Meeting with Jesus

1. Jesus Loaded with the Cross

Jesus is again clothed. He leaves the purple mantle and the sceptre but retains the crown of thorns. He is King and as a King He is going to die. The crown will not fall from His head. He embraces the cross, raises it, places it on His shoulders, and the cortege moves on. By His side, soldiers and executioners insult Him and ill-treat Him. They watch His painful advance and they rejoice at it. Two criminals sentenced to death escort Jesus. Look at Him. Hear His painful breathing. He can hardly move. A streak of blood marks His trail and betrays the precarious state of His poor body, all torn by the scourging. The cross is very heavy. It is not its material weight that crushes Jesus but especially all that it stands for. It is the burden of all the sins of all men. What a frightful weight! Your sins were also

enclosed in that cross that crushes Jesus. No wonder He is overwhelmed by it. Yet, nobody comes to help Him. He looks around and does not find any single volunteer to help Him carry the cross. He looks at you and at most He gets only fine words. Lofty desires but nothing practical.

What are you doing to alleviate that burden of the Cross of Christ? Do you remember this in your many faults? He looks at His Heavenly Mother and behold! She is the one, the only one who did not contribute to the burden of His cross with any sin. And She is the only one who knows how to console Him, to alleviate Him, to help Him. Stand by Her side, imitate Her and ask Her to teach you how to comfort Jesus.

2. The Cortege

a) There are those who loaded the cross on Him: the Jews, the Pharisees, the soldiers, the executioners. But they also bear within themselves the cross of their sins. There is no other alternative: either we bear the cross of Jesus or we bear the cross of Satan, which is more loathsome and far heavier.

b) There are also two men who bear their cross with Jesus: these are the thieves. But they do not

bear it for Jesus, for His love, but with anger and despair, by compulsion.

c) In the third place, there is the Cyrenean who bears the cross on his shoulders. What great happiness is his! At the beginning he knew nothing about it, and, on account of that, he did not freely accept the burden, but little by little he resigned himself and in the end he was carrying the cross willingly and joyfully and this sanctified him. So it is with the cross. Even when it is accepted by compulsion and against our will, in the end it can bring about our sanctification.

d) There is another group in this scene, that of the pious women. They accompany Jesus, have pity on Him, would like to alleviate Him and take, if they could, that burden from His shoulders, but their compassion is incomplete, because it is merely human. They see in Jesus an unfortunate man: they do not see a suffering God. That is why they do not understand the cause that leads Him to Calvary. Jesus tells them: "*Weep for your sins*". In this manner and only thus will you console Him.

e) Lastly, look at the little group that surrounds His sorrowful Mother. She knows how to carry the cross with Jesus and like Jesus. What a share Our

Lady takes in His sufferings and sorrows! How similar is the suffering in both hearts! They are equal in all. In intensity, because they have both reached the climax. In purpose, because it is for our sins that they are tortured. In the way, because they suffer out of pure love. The divine and infinite love of the Son reflects itself as much as it is possible in the heart of His sorrowful Mother. Now make your choice. You have to bear your cross; you have to accompany Christ on the way to Calvary. There is no getting away from this obligation. You are free only to choose the form and way in which you would carry your cross. Which group are you going to join?

Ask Our Lady to admit you in Hers, in the company of those holy souls around Her. Stand by Her, very close to Her and brace yourself up to suffer and to bear that cross which God may be pleased to give you. Never attempt to carry it alone. You would not be able. It would be too heavy for you. But at the side of your Mother all your crosses will turn out to be small, all sufferings will appear to be sweet.

3. The Meeting

Watch in silence this striking incident. No words can depict it. Let your heart speak and

feel whatever it is capable of. Try to gauge the longing of that Mother who wants to get close to Her Son.

She wants to exchange a glance, possibly one word, one token of love, one motherly touch. And so, there, in the middle of the street of sorrows She meets Him, stretches Her arms out to Him, would like to snatch Him from them, if it were possible, and take Him home. Jesus lifts His eyes and sees His Mother. Their eyes meet. What a lot of things would they tell! How well they understand each other!

Both hearts compenetrate each other and feel their suffering increased at the sight of each other's sufferings. She knew it all in advance; but She would not avoid that meeting. Perhaps She did not expect to find Her Son so terribly disfigured. What would be Her sorrow on seeing that divine face so hideously ill-treated, beaten, swollen and abused? Only She with Her eyes of a Mother could make Him out. Learn generosity from Mary's decision to meet Jesus in spite of the pain that would be caused Her. Do you also not hesitate to go out to the encounter of sorrow and trial for there will you invariably meet Jesus.

MEDITATION 66

On Calvary — The Crucifixion

1. Preparations for the Crucifixion

See now the arrival in Calvary. After the excruciating way of the cross, Jesus has finally reached there, not without having several times stumbled and fallen to the ground. Crushed by the pain and the fatigue, He is exhausted, pale, blood-stained. The executioners also have arrived, and wasting no time they set about preparing all the requirements for the crucifixion of Our Lord and of the thieves. Follow His poor Mother at this moment. She also has climbed the hill. She knows what is awaiting Her. Yet, courageous and resolute, She is ready to bear it. The execution of a man, no matter how big a criminal he has been, is always an impressive and horrible sight. What, then, would that scene cause in the sensitive heart of Mary, His Mother! Do not leave Her. Let the crowds climb Calvary out of ha-

tred or curiosity; you remain near the sorrowful Mother and while watching listen to the pantings of Her heart.

The executioners brutally tear away from Jesus all His garments. Fresh blood gushes from those renewed wounds. He remains bruised and naked, exposed to the eager eyes of the spectators. Hear the laughter and vulgarities of the soldiers and of the executioners. Maybe His own Jewish people echoed the same mocking cries. And try to hear the echoes in the heart of Mary. What would Her heart feel on seeing Her Jesus in such state? Presently, He is stretched with violence on the cross. They grasp one of His hands, press it on the wood, apply a nail and vigorously strike it home with the hammer. A shudder runs across the body of Jesus as the nail pierces His wrist. Observe His lips compressed in pain. See Him choking back the cry that would escape from His mouth. His eyes filled with involuntary tears, are lifted to Heaven. He looks at His Father. His thoughts run to you. He speaks to you: *"This"*, He says, *"is for you"*.

Then another blow of the hammer, then another, and another until both hands and feet are nailed to the cross. Can you not see those nails piercing the

heart of His Mother? All those blows find terrible echo in Her heart, She felt every blow as fiercely as He did. She also shuddered. She also looked to Heaven. She also thought of you. But how do you feel? What do you do on seeing Jesus and His Mother in such an ordeal?

2. On the Cross

Already nailed, He is dragged on the cross to the ditch where it is to be erected. The cross is lifted, then dropped into the hole. It hits the ground violently. The pain is indescribable. The whole weight of His body is hanging on the nails. And now the shock of that cross striking the ground renders the pain more excruciating. Jesus shudders convulsively. The blood flows down the cross in abundance. Not a tremor escapes the eyes of His Mother. Not a pain escapes Her observation. She sees all, She understands all, like Her Son; She bears all in silence.

Once again, together with, and close to Mary, watch this picture. Behold your King hanging between Heaven and earth: crucified, like a criminal between two thieves. Abandoned by His own people who rejoice at His suffering. Look at Him

well. Tell your Mother to show Him to you and to teach you how to look at Jesus crucified. See the divine head bending under the unbearable pain of the crown of thorns. See those eyes blinded by the blood which floods them. See that breast painfully heaving under the fatigue that chokes it. See that body all broken down, turned into one whole wound. See those hands and feet streaming blood. Look at Him well. It is Jesus, your Jesus, your King, your Redeemer, your Saviour.

3. The Insults

Yet there seems to be nobody around Jesus who does not rejoice, who does not take a satanic pleasure in that scene of blood. All around are sarcastic and horrible insults. What more could His enemies desire? They have achieved a complete victory. They have Jesus fastened to the cross; already about to expire; and yet they want to enjoy the last moments of agony by making Him suffer still more and to the bitter last, insulting Him even in His agony. What a tyrant is passion when it succeeds in enslaving the heart of man. It is never satisfied. It always wants more, no matter how brutal, how inhuman, how absolutely irrational. Passions have

no heart. And it was so with that multitude. Those Jews, those priests were so passionately vindictive against Jesus. They do not spare Him even in His agony. With the most vulgar insults they gloat over His sufferings. They mock Him as a Prophet who had said He could destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. They mock Him as Son of God, since thus He had called Himself. They insult Him as a Master and King who had power to save others but could not save Himself. They would still challenge Him: *"If you come down from the cross we will believe in you."* How sad must have been those mockeries for Jesus. See the amount of ingratitude and contempt of God's love involved by them, just at the most solemn moment of our Redemption.

Jesus would keep silent, would suffer, would go on suffering and tasting the infinite bitterness of His sorrow. How can we understand or express what all those insults meant to Mary? By the cross, as close to Her Son as She can be, She stands to the last. Stabat Mater, erect and motionless, Her hands pressed to Her breast, as if to restrain Her heart from jumping out, Her eyes fixed on Jesus. She cannot look elsewhere. She reads the Passion in that torn body, the book as it were written with a Divine Blood.

Watch death creep slowly towards the Divine Victim. And Mary, stronger than death, does not flee but remains there, without moving an inch. Stabat Mater. Hear the blasphemies of those tigers, who do not even respect the sorrow of a Mother, watching Her Son die. She might tearfully tell them: *"Enough, enough, you wild beasts! Leave Him in peace at least now. He is My Son. Have pity on my sorrow!"* But no. She, like Jesus, keeps silent. Her heart chokes in Her anguish. And while all nature shakes, the rocks crash, the earth quakes, She stands motionless. Stabat. Meditate on this and promise your Mother to be faithful to your duties, never to quit your post, never to desert your cross. Let it be said of you also as of Your Mother: *Stabat!*



MEDITATION 67

On Calvary — The Third Word

1. Mary in the Agony of Jesus

Look at the group of pious women who, standing by the cross, want to keep Jesus company till His death. The greatest proof of our love for Christ is, doubtlessly, to follow Him up to the cross; to be crucified with Him and to die with Him. In the middle of them all, as the leader and model, is Our Blessed Lady. Without Her the other women might not have had the courage to go up to Calvary, might have failed, unable to stand that terrible scene. Mary, with Her example, encourages and supports them. Why in your sufferings do you fail to look at Mary in order to learn from Her how to stand at the foot of the Cross?

In the meantime Jesus had already entered His last agony. A short time remains for Him and He wants to make the most of it in order, as usual, to

fulfill to perfection all His obligations. He is *King* and from His cross He bestows eternal crowns like the one He has just bestowed on the good thief. He is *Pontiff* and *High Priest* and as such He prays for His enemies. He implores and obtains pardon for their sins. He is the Son of Mary and as Son He looks after Her and does not abandon Her in that moment. He is Teacher, and as such He looks after the faithful disciple who is present there and also after the other faint-hearted disciples who have cowardly abandoned Him.

What an example Jesus gives us! In these moments of sorrow and of untold pain, of crucifixion and of death, when already in His agony, one would expect Him to think only of His own sufferings. Whereas He, on the contrary, thinks of us all; remembers us all. Measure your selfishness against that selflessness, the immense charity of Jesus. How do you behave when you are sick, when you are sorrow-stricken? Do you seek only consolation and complain of any lack of attention?

Learn also how to be faithful to your obligations. Even at that moment Jesus did not dispense Himself from the exact fulfilment of His duties. Shame upon us. How often does not the slightest

ailment, the most insignificant indisposition suffice to cause us to abandon our duty?

2. "Behold Thy Son"

It was then that Jesus, looking at His Mother, uttered the words referring to John; and in John to all of us. Enter into the heart of the Holy Virgin and see the shudder of pain that goes through Her on hearing these words. Poor Mother! How much She suffers! Those words are a goodbye. Jesus is about to go. That is why those words are a supreme goodbye to His Mother.

Jesus, Her life, Her all, is about to go. She is going to lose Him. Not just as when He was a boy and She found Him again in the temple. This time She will never more see Him in this world. From now on She will be a bereaved Mother. A Mother without Her child! But Jesus gives Her a new son. *Behold, from now, Thy son!* But this, far from consoling Her, is bound to torture Her more. A mother wants for a child only her own. She will not exchange him for anything and for anybody and especially when there is such a difference between the one and the other. John, it is true, was a faithful and devoted disciple. Her Son was the Master.

While John was the son of Zebedee, Her Son was the Son of God. John was not Her Jesus. Also, She sees that along with John and with as much right as he, so many other children are given to Her among whom are the disciples, so cowardly and selfish, those who at the moment of test flee and desert the Master; and together with them, all of us. What an inheritance! What a heavy burden. What a humiliating maternity. Just compare your heart with that of Jesus and try to understand Mary's sorrow at this substitution.

However, She does not refuse. In order to become the Mother of God Her consent had been requested. But Jesus does not ask Her whether She wants to be our Mother or not. He knows Her heart and that suffices. He does not hesitate to load on it the burden of being the Mother of sinners. Contemplate the humility of Mary when with immense sorrow She repeats at the foot of the cross the words She once had uttered with ineffable joy: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to Thy word*. And in this manner She accepted what the Lord sent Her. If we were always to leave God's hands free to do with us whatever He pleases, if we always ac-

cepted whatever His loving Will sends us, what great strides would we not make on the road to sanctity!

3. "Behold Thy Mother!"

If the first words were sorrowful for Mary, the second were sweet and consoling for us. Behold Thy Mother! So we have now a Mother; and what a Mother! A Mother forever that no one will ever snatch away from us. God has placed the mother in the world that she may everywhere be the most eloquent incarnation of His Providence and of His Love. Man needs a mother. The greatest misfortune that can befall us is to lose our mother, without her all is sad, all is empty. Nobody can fill her place. Nobody can substitute her.

Jesus embraced His cross with all its sufferings up to the separation from His Mother, but bequeathed Her to you that you may never be an orphan. And this Blessed Mother will never fail you. How true is that! After we have lost our mother, then especially do we feel the need for all that He bequeathed us from His cross. How generous! To the thief He gave a kingdom. To us, His Mother! What were the feelings of John on hearing this?

Calvary was turned into paradise for him. How well did Jesus reward him for having been faithful in his love, and followed Him up to the cross. He climbed Calvary a disciple of Jesus. How joyfully did he enter into possession of this rich inheritance. So rich it is, that God has no greater one in Heaven!

Apply all this to yourself. You can also say that the word of God is quickening and efficacious, it achieves what it means. Mary is verily your Mother and loves you with a love equal to the love She bears for Jesus. You also must be in truth a real child of Mary and so you must love Her as Jesus loved Her. You have an obligation to be similar to Jesus so as to be a worthy child of such a Mother, so as to be His brother. It is only natural that brothers should be very much alike. Compare yourself with Him and, in all humility and shame, ask pardon for the many times you have not loved your common Mother, for the many times you have disregarded Her with your behaviour. Ask this Mother that although you sometimes forgot Her Son, She might never forget to be your Mother, never abandon you.

MEDITATION 68

Mary and the Death of Jesus

1. The Last Words

a) Thought it was only about midday when they nailed Jesus to the cross, a thick darkness invaded the earth. The sun is darkened to veil the frightful scene of Calvary. In the middle of the silent darkness which enveloped the earth, Jesus opened His lips and cried: *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* Listen to those words. Make them resound in the depth of your heart. Ask Our Lady by whose side you are to make you understand the mysterious meaning of Christ's desolation. Stop a while and think. Jesus abandoned and alone! What desolation is His when He finds Himself alone on Calvary, abandoned in the Tabernacle, derelict in so many souls who pay no need to Him. Are you one of them? How this complaint strikes the heart of Mary! You indeed, however great your sufferings,

cannot complain that you are left alone. Jesus chose to be abandoned that you might never be so. God has undertaken never to abandon you and yet how justly He could do so! Considering your inconstancy, your faults, your relapses, your want of love; is God not entitled to tire of you? Embrace Our Lady at the foot of the cross and request Her for the sake of Her Son never to relinquish you, never to abandon you. While you, for your part, promise never to desert Jesus.

b) Time creeps on; the sufferings of Jesus keep mounting. But there is one particular pain which causes a special complaint from Him. *I am thirsty.* What would that torture of thirst be? And how would it be felt by His own Mother? Not only water, but the whole of Her blood would She willingly have given Him. But She must be resigned to see Him suffer and with Him She suffers. Those cruel executioners mock Him still, further they offer Him gall and vinegar to drink. But do you not also, if you search your heart, have to admit that what Jesus finds in it is not generous blood, cleansed of selfishness and saturated with love, but rather the bitter gall of ingratitude, the

repulsive vinegar of lukewarmness, of coldness, of inconstancy.

c) The supreme moment is approaching. Our Lady who does not take Her eyes from Her Son, has already discovered in His face the unmistakable signs of approaching death. She trembles on seeing that the end is in sight. Then She sees Jesus painfully raise His eyes for the last time and exclaim: It is achieved, and then, with a paramount effort He exclaims: *Father, into Thy hands I entrust my spirit.* Divine words! If all the words of Jesus were carved in the heart of His Mother, how would these magnificent last ones remain engraved in it. The Master had ended His teaching with a sublime lecture that closed the book of His life. What happiness, to be able to render our soul to God by saying: All is achieved. Whatever Thou commissioned me to achieve in this world, whatever Thou wanted from me, that which Thou hadst a right to expect from my soul, in one word, all my obligations, I have fulfilled them: I have burnt my life till the end, in Thy service, for Thy glory. Why should it not be so with us all? Ask Our Lady to teach you how to spend your life in this manner. How to wind up your

career in this way so that at the end of it, without shame or remorse you may through the hands of Mary place your spirit in the hands of God.

2. The Death of Jesus

With a majesty and dignity befitting a God, Jesus bends His head and expires. At this moment, the earth trembles, the veil of the Temple is torn asunder, the rocks collide against one other, many sepulchres are opened, and through their gaping mouths many dead come back to life to give testimony to the divinity of Our Lord. And in the midst of that tragic and frightful commotion of the whole of Creation Our Blessed Lady, steadfast, serene and courageous, does not grow frightened, does not run away, but embraces the cross and places on the feet of Her dead Son the purest kiss, the sweetest, the most tender that a mother ever laid on the dead body of her child. Overwhelmed by sorrow, She had followed all the steps of His agony. And now, on seeing Him dead, far from breaking down and falling crushed under the weight of Her boundless sorrow, She lifts Herself, upheld by grace, and offers Her consent to the frightful sacrifice. Kissing the cross which made Her suffer so much, She offers up to the Eternal Father the

immolation of that Divine Victim for the salvation of the sinners of the whole world.

Enter into the sorrow-stricken heart of that Mother, the most sorrowful of all mothers, and you will find there the living altar where the Divine Lamb was immolated at the cost of untold sufferings. And yet that torn heart remains tranquil, fulfilling at every moment the Holy Will which demanded such a sacrifice.

Do not forget. No one is exempt from the cross. Do not persist in turning your back on it. You will merely render it heavier. Embrace your cross. The more painful and heavy it is, the more affectionately accept it. Be generous with the One who at His death sanctified the cross. Die to yourself, fasten yourself to the cross which God bestows on you. Only then will you sanctify yourself. *As with the cross is Heaven gained, nor is there with the cross eternal loss, there is no cross without a Saint, there is no saint without a cross.*

3. The Piercing of the Heart

Jesus was dead, but there was still His Mother who could continue to suffer for Him. And in fact this was the case. One of the soldiers, to make sure

of death, buried his spear into the side of Jesus. The thrust was so vigorous that it went right into the heart. It did not make the Son suffer more but how it pierced the heart of the Mother. With what love would She collect the Blood that flowed from the Heart of Her Son! The last drop of Blood that still remained. The last He was shedding for the salvation of the world.

The open side of Christ is a most consoling mystery. Through that wound, as through a large mystery, we can, as so many loving souls have done before, enter freely and hide within the Sacred Heart of Jesus and dwell therein. This happy wound has torn the veil that concealed that Heart. Jesus' Heart which had so loved men, lies bare, open to all, that we may see it, adore it, learn from it the sublime lesson of His love. You cannot know what love is unless you enter into the most intimate recesses of that Heart. That is the unique school, the only model.

We may suppose that Our Heavenly Mother, in the midst of Her sufferings, on contemplating that enormous wound, fell into ecstasy. She, before anybody, was the first to watch that Heart. She had never seen it before. Possibly, She prostrated Herself in adoration and atonement for all those present as

well as for all who throughout the centuries to come would offend Him. That was the first public act of worship and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Mary was the first adorer and atoner of the Divine Heart. Learn from Mary this sanctifying devotion. She is the treasurer of the wealth of that Heart. She possesses its key. Ask your Mother to place you inside the Heart of Jesus and to lock you there so that you may never abandon that shelter where the lukewarm becomes fervent and the fervent becomes a saint.



MEDITATION 69

The Solitude of Mary

1. Jesus Dead in the Arms of His Mother

Try to imagine the scene. The body of Christ is still hanging from the cross covered with blood; wounded from head to foot. The whole body broken. There is no beauty in it. It is hardly recognisable as human. Bloodless, lifeless, just a corpse. And yet this is the Son of God. What a mystery! At the foot of the cross some holy souls weep in silence. Great is their sorrow. But how to compare it to the sorrow of the Mother mourning the loss of Her Son? Poor Mother! What is She going to do without Her Child? Perhaps, in the midst of burial.

Where and how to bury Him? She had no sepulchre; no means to buy one. All Her friends have gone into hiding. And some have even become His enemies! Where to go? Who is going to take Jesus down from the cross? In that black moment it was a great

consolation for Her to see those holy men fulfil that pious duty. How grateful to them would She remain in Her heart!

In fact, with infinite care they take Him down from the cross, and lay that sacred body in Her arms. Let us kneel in spirit beside that Mother and meditate with Her. At the sight of that dead body She recalls each and every detail of that dead body. And She recalls each and every detail of the torments of His passion. She evokes the charming past, the scenes of Bethlehem, the idylls of Nazareth, the happy days when She looked after Her Son as no other mother would ever do. Well, did She realise now what was meant by that Sword of Simeon, that Sword which had remained in Her heart all Her life long. Well did She now realise what was entailed in being our Mother, Mother of sinners, Mother of those who have reduced Her Son to such a state. Would She love them when they had made Her Jesus suffer so much? What a painful maternity! And yet, kissing those wounds one by one, She would keep on repeating; "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done in me according to His Holy will."

Make this meditation in union with Mary. Together with Her go on plucking out those thorns

one by one. Pluck them out carefully as though Jesus could still suffer from them. Wipe those eyes, that face defiled with spittle and blood. Touch those hands and those feet pierced by the nails. Kiss the gaping wound in His side. Do not take your eyes from that Heart now without life. Visible through the wound, silent, motionless, it is true, but never without love. At each wound remember your sins and see what you have done by them.

2. The Holy Burial

Those pious men, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, together with the holy women and Our Holy Mother prepare to anoint the Holy Body. Watch that operation and see how lovingly and delicately they cleanse those wounds and anoint them with balm and perfume. Perhaps Our Lady reserved for Herself the task of washing and anointing the Holy Head.... She Herself would cover that Divine Face with fine lines. What a sorrow for Her as She cast the last glance on that face She knew so well. How often in ecstasy She had watched it!

The body is now taken to the sepulchre. Join you the sad procession which for the last time accompanies the body of Jesus. How sad it is when we must

abandon the dead body of some beloved person! When we take it from home to the last dwelling our hearts well nigh break. How long — and at the same time, how short — is the journey to the cemetery. While on one hand we would like to arrive as soon as possible, and put an end at last to all sad ceremonies, on the other we dread the arrival of that moment of total separation, of the last goodbye. What would be the suffering of the heart of Our Mother at that moment? The body is laid in the sepulchre; the stone slowly rolls down and hides the holy body. How can we explain what takes place in the soul of Mary? Now She is alone — utterly alone —without Her Son. She cannot tear Herself away. She cannot possibly live without Him. Do not be in a hurry to move away from there. Linger a little while. Remain before the sepulchre of Jesus in company with that Virgin who is Your Mother. Think of the tomb; the end of all earthly things. Jesus wanted to undergo this humiliation that at our death it might be our comfort and example.

But no! Death is not humiliating when it is like the death of Christ, nor is the sepulchre, even if our body is eaten up by worms, provided we are similar to our Master. Glorious is the death and happy is the sepulchre of the saints!

Remember, moreover, that you daily bear Jesus in your heart and that He wanted His tomb to be new and clean, a spot where no one save Himself had been placed. Ponder over these circumstances and see that your heart must be like that sepulchre of Jesus. Examine if Jesus can find in it those perfumes of virtue symbolised by the ointments which scented His body. He wants them in your heart also. Ask Our Lady to make up for your miserable poverty. Ask Her to teach you how to keep Jesus in your heart all your life long so that you are never deprived of His presence.

3. The Return from Calvary

Our Saviour remained in the sepulchre. For Mary, there was neither rest nor tranquillity. She found Herself so lonely, so bereaved, so derelict and homeless! Gently accompanied by those souls around Her, but feeling in Her heart a frightful solitude, She set out on the return journey to Her dwelling. Those around Her, with a heavy heart, thought of the torn heart of the Mother returning alone without Her Son! Follow Her in that sorrowful trip.

On Her way back, She had to climb Calvary again. How would She feel on seeing the Cross,

void and empty, stained with the blood of God! She stops at its foot, embraces it, adores it. The cross is no longer an infamous gibbet. It is no longer something hateful, horrible and accursed. In the cross Mary sees the tree of life which has just given us fully ripened the fruit of our salvation. The cross is now the Key of Heaven. It is the sword which will ever conquer the enemies of Christ. It is the weapon of combat for all Christians.

From now on it will be the madness of those loving souls who will be unable to live without it, those who choose to embrace it and live crucified on it. The cross will now be a weighing scale where all our actions will be weighed and where men will find the reason of their damnation or salvation. Oh, divine and blessed Cross! What sweet expressions would Our Lady pour on it! How She would give vent to Her feelings in sweet tears and tender embrace! Let us too embrace that cross, be enamoured of it, since it was watered by the Blood of Christ and by the tears of His Mother. Let the cross be, as St. Paul tells us, our greatest glory and happiness.

Then Mary got up and proceeded on Her journey. How many recollections thronged Her mind on reaching the accursed City. The God-killing city!

Its streets are still fresh with the blood of Her Son. She often stops to kiss those holy stains. At every bend, at every corner, a thousand recollections crowd Her mind. There He fell. There they met. There He lifted His cross. And there, amidst the shadow of darkness is the palace of Herod where Jesus was dismissed as a mad man. And there, is the palace of Pilate and the square where the mob cried for His death. And the balcony of the Ecce Homo and the court-yard of the scourging. Poor Mother! How She recounts those steps one by one!

Accompany Our Heavenly Mother very often on this devout pilgrimage. Make the stations of the cross well and often and always accompany Our Blessed Lady. She will teach you how to make the stations of the cross well.



MEDITATION 70

Mater Dolorosa

1. Queen of Martyrs

Suffering is a general law that applies to all men without exception. The child needs no one to teach him how to cry and weep. His subsequent life will also be spent between mourning and weeping. We cannot escape suffering. It awaits us where we least expect it, perhaps when we are surrounded by the greatest joys of life. Indeed, these are often just a prelude to tears. When you receive some very great joy, think that soon, perhaps, some severe shock, either physical or moral, of the body or of the soul, from within or from without, will eventually strike you. It is sheer madness to want to enjoy life by merely escaping suffering. The thorns are least painful when we meet them generously. Welcome them and, above all, sanctify them and raise every sorrow of suffering to the supernatural order.

Jesus wanted to be called the Man of Sorrows and His Mother the Queen of Martyrs. These are your models. They are the only ones who through their example can comfort you and teach you how to sanctify them. "*Blessed be suffering*", Christ has said. *Blessed are those who weep, those who mourn, those who suffer*. We should feel pity on the one who does not know how to suffer, not on the one who suffers much. Our Lord made His Mother sharer of His glory, and on that account He made Her also the companion of all His sufferings. The more God loves a soul, the more sufferings He sends it in order to raise it to greater glory just as He did with His own Mother. How much did Our Lady suffer at the foot of the cross! But how great is Mary at the foot of the Cross! What a pearl would be missing from Her crown if She did not possess the pearl of suffering! It was necessary, since She was a Queen, that She should also be Queen of Suffering and of Martyrdom. And if She is the Queen of Sorrows, She must have suffered more than anyone else a martyrdom that lasted a life time.

To us God sends sufferings one by one. And He keeps our future sufferings from our knowledge. We only suffer the present. But to Mary from the

beginning He revealed all that She had to suffer in order not to spare Her sorrow but that the sword of suffering should remain in Her heart Her whole life through. Think of Her sufferings. How deeply was She wounded by the ingratitude, by the betrayal, by the abandonment, by the indifference of which Her Son was made a target, Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Crib and Calvary, the Temple, the palaces of Herod and Pilate. In all those places Her heart was horribly lacerated. She even went through the loss of Jesus in order to teach us how to suffer and how to seek Him whenever we lose Him by sin. Stop and ponder over the sufferings of Your Mother.

2. Human and Natural Suffering

In all those sufferings of Mary consider also their natural and human side. The measure of suffering is the intensity of love. We are pained to quit or lose what we love. The greater the love, the greater the sorrow. With this measuring rod try to gauge the sorrows of Mary. Hers was the suffering of a mother and that should tell you all. A mother's love is the most pure, the most noble, the most selfless on earth. That is why God wanted us to have

only one mother. She alone suffices to fill the whole of our life with an ineffable fondling, with a warm kiss, with the satisfying love that sets our heart at peace. How great is the love of a mother, and then how would Our Lady love Her Son! God had placed in Her heart all the tenderness of all the mothers so that She should worthily love His Son. Nothing else was worthy of the Son of God who wanted to be called the Son of Man par excellence. What then would be Her abysmal sorrow on the occasion of the loss of Her Son!

Think also that the Son She had lost was Her only Son. She had no other with whom to console Herself. And that only Son was the best of all, the most loving. On the one hand the most loving, as no other man ever loved. On the other hand He was also the most innocent. And yet She was losing Him as though He were a criminal. It was not a sickness, a fortuitous accident that snatched Him away from Her. It was a betrayal, an ingratitude, it was a horrible injustice that reaped His young life in the midst of the most excruciating tortures and in Her very presence! Think how intimate was that union which prevailed between Jesus and Mary. Her Son was verily Her life, Her

all. This will help you to realise the enormous sorrow of the Mother.

Moreover, it is true that sensibility has different degrees, that it varies from man to man, and that the greater the sensibility, the more fierce is the suffering. And Mary, having such a perfect organism and therefore so extraordinarily sensitive, was of such an exquisite sensibility. How great, then, would Her sorrow be when confronted with such ingratitude, with such an injustice! Ponder over these points and you will feel like applying to Our Lady those words of Jeremias: *Look and see whether there is a suffering comparable to mine!*

3. Divine and Natural Sorrow

We cannot realize the intensity of the human and natural suffering of Mary. How then could we have even an approximate idea of Her supernatural sorrow? Mary suffered on losing Her Son, on seeing Him suffer and die; but She suffered especially because She knew Him to be God. Who has known God as well as Mary? Who has loved God as much as Mary?

Recollect the great love of so many holy souls, of the angels and seraphim. Well, all that is nothing in comparison with the love which Mary bore to Her

God. How then, would She feel the offences, the insults, the torture to which men submitted Him? If as a Mother She felt the echo of His sufferings in Her heart, what would She not feel as the Mother of God? People realising that they had offended God have been known to die of sorrow for their sins. But for a special grace, She would have died of sorrow at the sight of the grievous offences which the chosen people had inflicted on Christ during His passion.

Moreover, Mary underwent all these untold sufferings without any spiritual consolation of any kind. The martyrs were able to suffer joyfully whilst embracing the cross. The sight of Jesus crucified used to encourage the ascetics, strengthen the anchorites and harden them in their austerities. But the Crucifix, the sight of Jesus nailed on the cross was precisely Mary's greatest torture. That same One who would be a consoler for others was an executioner for Her. That afflicted Her maternal heart. Hers were not merely physical sufferings. But although Her body did not experience the scourging and nailing, Her sorrow was the more intense, being all internal, pure, spiritual.

Finally, the climax of this suffering came when Our Lady, content not only to be present at the sac-

rifice of Her Son came to the point of desiring it. Mary had two sons, one innocent, the other a sinner. We ourselves are the latter. If She had decided that the innocent son was to live, She thus had to accept the condemnation of the sinner. If Mary wanted the sinner-son to be saved, She had to agree to the sacrifice of the Other. Which would She choose? As a Mother She had to love us as much as did Jesus, and She had practically reached the point of preferring us to Him; in as much as She knew that such was the Will of God, *Who did not spare His own Son*. She declared that this was Her will also. And consequently, She did not spare Jesus.

There She stood, then, by the foot of the cross, dying of sorrow and yet desiring, even consenting to the death of Jesus, in order that we might be saved. How much love and how much suffering! How great was the price Our Lady had to pay that we might be Her children! We generally appreciate and love what costs much. Great then must be Our Lady's love for us since it made Her suffer so much. Hence then enough ingratitude; cease making Your Mother suffer. Love Her at the cost of any sacrifice, even at the cost of your life.

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